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# **A PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE**



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MUSIC ON THE SHAKESPEARIAN STAGE

THE DIALECT OF HACKNESS, NORTH-EAST  
YORKSHIRE

A YORKSHIRE TYKE

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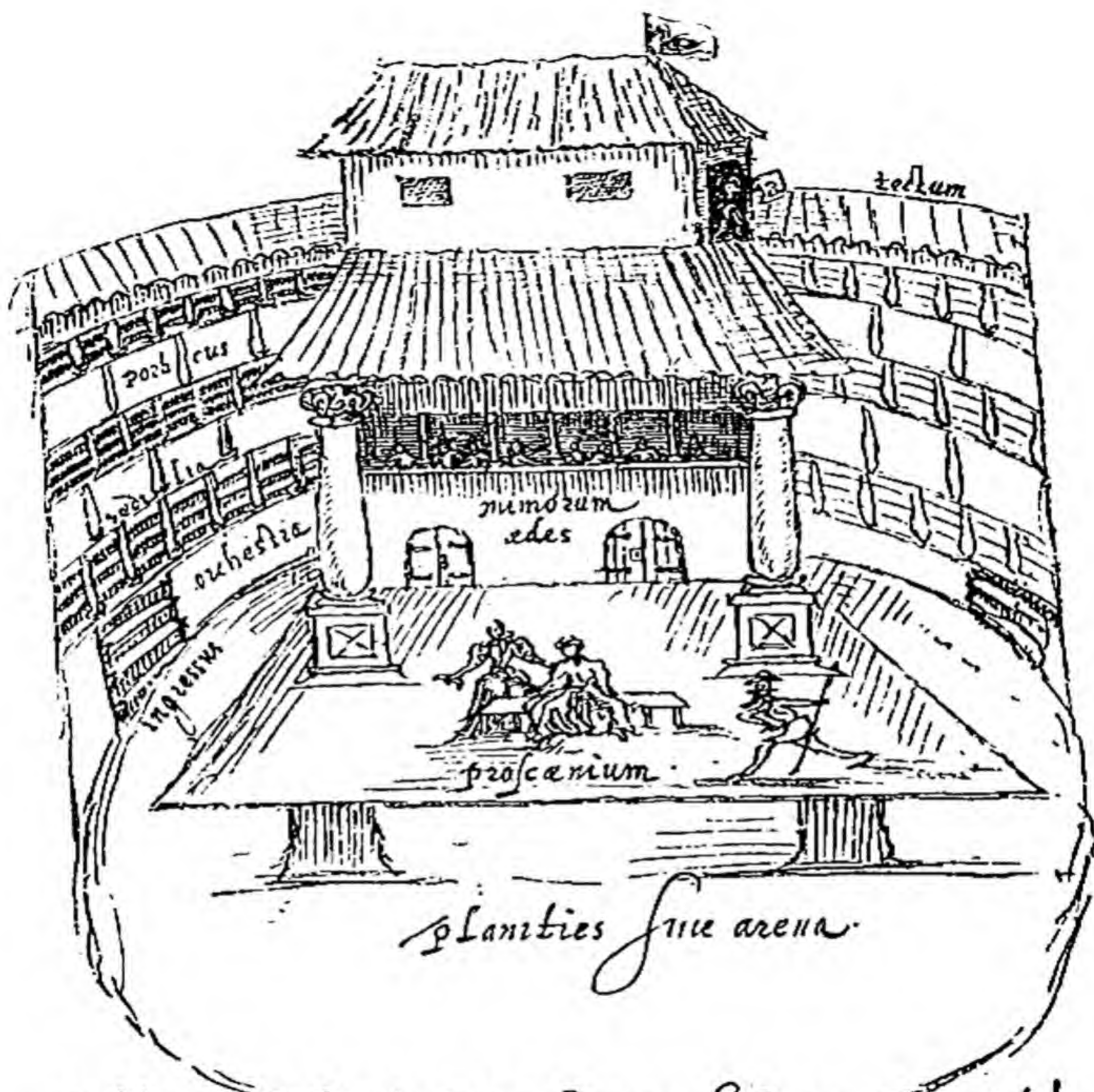
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quintum sed ~~dispositio et structura~~, bistracum coniectat  
 prius designatum, in quo multi vrsi, tauri, et stupenda  
 magnitudinis canes, dyaboli canes et felines aluntur; qui

# THE SWAN THEATRE

(From Arundell van Buchell's drawing after Johannes de Witt, about 1596)

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219

# A PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

BY  
GEORGE H. COWLING

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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36 ESSEX STREET W.C.  
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## PREFACE

**I**T is true that there are many books, good, bad, and foolish, on the subject of Shakespeare's life and works; but the vast subject is capable of approach from so many sides that a fresh route up the mountain is bound to have some merits of its own. I think there is no short book on Shakespeare—save perhaps the "Primer" of the late Professor Dowden, which has long been out of date—that covers similar ground, and a comparison will show that the books differ greatly.

I have tried to take a sane view of the subject, eschewing both antiquated opinions and modern follies and whimsies. This may appear simple, but it is really about as easy as dancing on the tight-rope, as will be apparent to any critic who will trouble to inquire what are the established and generally accepted facts and opinions about Shakespeare's life, work and genius. I cannot pretend to have done more than to have avoided the discussion of futile problems, and to have expressed my own doubts and beliefs where my mind is made up. I make no claim that this book will revolutionize the accepted portrait of our Shakespeare; but it will be found inevitably that the book does contain some restatements and some original views, and it should not be found the worse for its lack of sensational theory and deluded enthusiasm. Finally, I have to thank Professor R. H. Case for his kindness in reading the book in proof, and moreover for making from his vast knowledge of the subject many valuable criticisms and suggestions.

G. H. COWLING

LEEDS, 1924



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# A PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

## I

### SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

**I**F by some magic of illusion we could be taken back across the centuries to visit the England in which Shakespeare lived, and through which he tramped from Stratford-on-Avon to London town, we should hardly recognize our own country, thinly inhabited as it then was by some five million souls, of whom only about a million were scattered in the barren and bleak north, and by far the greater part, including the quarter of a million who lived in and around London, were settled in the richer agricultural lands which lie to the south of Humber and the east of the Severn. The rivers and the hills would still be there, but the landscape would puzzle us. We should find that most of the roads were little better than tracks, and that many of the bridges were still either fords or ferries. The hawthorn hedges, which give such charm to the English countryside in summer, were for the most part not yet planted. In Kent we should find them, and perhaps in other fertile districts where landowners and squires were beginning to enclose the open fields of the village in the interests of better tillage or of sheep-farming; but in most parts of England we should gaze on a prospect of open country stretching clear from village to village, and unbroken, save where some chase of woodland, fenland, or thicket intercepted



the view. The plains and the middle heights are tilled. Down in the valley the watercourse flows through sedgy channels fringed with osiers and salallows, the haunt of snipe and coot. On the uplands lie tracts uncultivated since the coming of man to this island, windy moors, heathery hills, green wastes of rough turf dotted with twisted old thorn trees and golden furze, and silent native forests where the village gentry, ignorant of all the arts save farming, heraldry, and law, are wont in autumn to chase with their boon companions the buck and the hare.

Let us look at a typical village, with its gabled houses of wood, plaster and tiles, and its more elaborate stone hall with the mullioned windows and high chimneys. The cultivated land is tilled partly by the landowners, and partly by the villagers in common. The huge fields extend for a mile or two on each side of the village around the landlord's domain. There is also a waste or common grazing ground for the cows and pigs of the village. Unkempt, unweeded, it blows in summer time with all sorts of grasses and wild flowers. Undrained, it varies between rough grass, thick with charlock and bracken, stony outcrops, and treacherous bogs. The other fields are arable lands, divided into allotments apportioned yearly without permanence of tenure or possibility of improvement upon the traditional methods of cultivation, to each villager according to his rank and status. In spring and summer these allotments are little hives of industry, for every process of tilth—caring (or ploughing), harrowing, sowing, weeding, reaping and gathering—is laborious toil for both man and the patient steers who draw his plough and his wain. There are no mechanical implements. The simple plough, the harrow, the hoe, the sickle, and the scythe are man's sole tools for the winning of his yearly supply of food for man and beast from ungenerous nature. In autumn and winter the head-



lands are abandoned, and the pigs and fowls of the village come forth every morning from the cottages where they lurk under the rafters, to glean barley and rye amongst the coarse stubble. Not only swine, but sheep and oxen are slaughtered and salted for provision against the famine of winter. In the absence of transport, and consequently of the possibility of import, every village is a self-supporting community. The weaver, the tailor, the miller, the chandler and the shoemaker live in the village and render their services in return for the corn which they do not grow and the flesh which they do not rear.

We should find the towns equally puzzling. We should recognize the parish church, and the market-place fronted by gabled houses with small windows ; but the homes of the majority of the townsmen, in courts and narrow streets running back from the high roads, would seem incredibly small and overcrowded. Some no doubt would have a rod or two of garden ; others would be crowded as closely as houses could be pushed together. There was no drainage, except perhaps an open sewer running down to the nearest stream, from a higher reach of which came perhaps the freshwater supply, unless there were good wells in the town. Each house burnt its own refuse in its house-fire of wood, turf or charcoal ; or dumped it, if the aldermen were lax, on a dunghill, there to breed, perhaps pestilence, and certainly plagues of flies. Somewhere in the town, either fronting a main street or hidden away amongst the houses of the burghers, were the guild-hall of the merchants and craftsmen, and also the grammar school, and the almshouses, the gifts of pious benefactors. Near the church is the vicarage or rectory of the curate of the parish, a large house for an important person, as his name, "the parson," implies. We should recognize him by his white



bands, and by his black university gown worn over his long ecclesiastical cassock, which hangs down almost to his shoes. We should find him an earnest man, keenly interested in religious scruples, doubtful about liberties of prophesying and the exact dogma of the Lord's Supper, grave in countenance, melancholy in disposition, married no doubt, and endeavouring to continue in his parish, now shorn of endowments and means, something of that ecclesiastical, educational and charitable work which the Church had done before the Reformation deprived it of part of its revenues and of much of the efficiency of its organization.

It was through town and country of this kind that Shakespeare tramped to London from Stratford-on-Avon—an agricultural England, with sharp class-division between gentleman and scholar on the one hand and peasant and tradesman on the other; a land of violent extremes of ostentatious wealth and utter poverty, of pedantic learning and complete ignorance of book-lore; torn by the dissension between the old faith and the reforming zeal, but still a merry England, the home of sturdy sports such as archery, hunting, hawking, and tilting at the quintain and the barriers. The passenger from Stratford would approach London from the west, through the suburb which is now Holborn and Oxford Street. Down to the River Thames stretched even then the legal suburb of the Inns of Court, and the Strand was a fashionable residential quarter of great houses fronting the river as far as Whitehall. To the north, Smithfield and the Charter House lay without the walls, but London itself was begirdled with walls, roughly oval in outline, extending from Ludgate and Newgate in the west to Bishopsgate and Aldgate in the east. The river was its chief highway, sweeping in its gentle course past Westminster, Whitehall, the Strand and Blackfriars, to



London Bridge and "Julius Cæsar's ill-erected Tower." At short distances apart on both sides of the river were landing-stairs, off which lay fleets of boats manned by the hundreds of watermen of the Thames—the taxi-drivers of the age. The gentry had their own private barges and watermen. The extent of the city and suburbs along the north bank of the river caused the boatman's easy and pleasant progress to be the most expeditious and comfortable mode of transport ; for though the city was crowded with coaches and drays, the streets were paved with cobbles, and the vehicles were without springs.

London had many remarkable public buildings. Old St. Paul's, a cruciform church of vast dimensions built in the decorated style of Gothic, was not only the principal church and cathedral of London, but a meeting-place for friends, and a mart. Through its open doors crowded into "Paul's Walk," as its centre aisle was called, a promenading crowd of fashionable loungers, fops, spendthrifts, and their duns and moneylenders. Though deprived of its graceful spire since its destruction by lightning in 1561, the cathedral still rose high above the gabled houses of Thames Street and Cheapside. The most striking modern building was Sir Thomas Gresham's Exchange for the merchants of London, built on the site of the present Royal Exchange in imitation of the Bourse at Antwerp. Here, in a courtyard surrounded by a *loggia* adorned with Renaissance statues, under the shadow of a Flemish belfry, the merchants of the Royal Exchange conducted with due gravity their important affairs, whilst the beadle with his pole-axe chased away the little urchins from the adjoining lanes who thither had come to use the sacred "Burse" as a children's playground. The Guildhall and the Tower were there, the Tower somewhat more of a fortress in those days with its battery of cannon dominating the river ; and the city bristled



with the spires and steeples of many Gothic churches in various states of preservation and decay. But the most charming, and also the most enormous structure in London was the famous old London Bridge, a town in itself of gabled and crenellated houses of huge dimensions, built on the stone arches protected by piles which spanned the river where the high road north and south from Waltham Cross and Edmonton to Southwark and Croydon crossed the Thames. It was a thing of beauty with its high mediæval and Elizabethan houses, including a chapel, and the famous Nonsuch House. In the centre was a drawbridge to allow ships to pass through; and on the southern gatehouse, which guarded the approach to London from Southwark High Street, were displayed on pikes the heads of traitors—a touch of barbarism which was characteristic of the age. Below the bridge from Billingsgate to the Tower and down to the "Pool" between Bermondsey and Wapping, the river bristled with shipping, galleys, galleons, fustes, and frigates from the Baltic and the Levant; and down at Deptford lay Drake's ship, *The Golden Hind*, in which in 1577-80 he had sailed through Magellan Strait into the Pacific Ocean, plundered Valparaiso, and returned to England via the Cape of Good Hope, making the first English voyage round the world.

On the south side of the river, a little to the west of the church of St. Mary Overies, now the Cathedral of Southwark, in gardens which ran inland from the houses of Bankside, stood in 1600 many of the theatres: the *Rose*, the *Swan*, the *Bear Garden*, and the *Globe*. Hither, attracted by the flags which indicated a public performance, and notified of the title of the play by the bills displayed in the book-sellers' shops, or on posts, came from Paul's Walk, from the Inns of Court, from eating-house or "ordinary," from court, from shop and booth, an



LONDON BRIDGE  
(From *Visscher's View of London*, 1616)



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audience of all sorts and conditions of men, conveyed in boats, as the countrymen of Raleigh, Drake, and Frobisher should be, from Blackfriars, Paul's Wharf and Queen Hythe. The richest of them, and those who would be thought prosperous, dressed richly and even gaudily. They wore doublets waisted to the figure and silken trunk-hose. Their frilled collars or ruffs made every head look like that of John the Baptist on the charger. Every gallant carried a sword, a Toledo blade for choice, with a gilt scabbard and hilts. The colours of their dresses were gay; white, scarlet and purple were favourite colours. Their velvet cloaks, covering the doublet to the thighs, were trimmed with lace of silver or gold, and clasped by jewelled brooches. Their high crowned hats were adorned with silver buckles, or with feathers. Every gallant had his gold ring. Every nobleman his massive gold chain or collar, something like those which our mayors still wear. Actors, sailors, and many of the fashionable world, wore gold ear-rings, and smoked their new-fangled tobacco, or "drank it" in their own idiom, in long clay pipes.

The dress of women was even more extravagant. They wore the doublet or bodice, like men, and also the ruff, together with a crinoline skirt called a "farthingale." Silk stockings and cork-heeled shoes of all colours, tightly laced waists, and head-dresses elaborated with feathers and false hair, were all marks of fashion. It was possible for a fashionable lady to carry in dress and jewels the equivalent of the value of a manor. The wives of citizens and peasants dressed simply in gowns of woollen stuff, with linen caps or hats of rush or straw. Good housewives they were, if the praises of their panegyrists are to be believed. The servant problem did not exist. It was the custom of parents of all classes to transfer their daughters to the service of others of the same



class. The custom cannot have been universal, but at least it was thought no shame to wash and bake and brew, to clean pewter and brass, and to make garments. Women's work included much that is now done outside the home. They preserved fruit. They sewed for use, as well as for ornament. They baked their own bread and pastry. And though they were unable to resort to the apothecary for patent medicines for every petty ailment, they appear to have borne the ills of life as bravely as their descendants.

For though in some respects—in its cruelty, its love of power, its coarseness and barbarism—it was, like many ages before and since, the worst of all ages, yet the world felt very young and gay. There seemed to be boundless possibilities to "the relief of man's estate" ready to be revealed by the power of knowledge, or in Bacon's words "the enlarging of the bounds of human empire to the effecting of all things possible." The discoveries of southern Africa and the New World, and later the new astronomy of Copernicus, and the new physics of Galileo, opened to all but the brutish :

"A world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence."

And the new humane study of the classics promised to civilize barbarian hearts, to quell superstition and folly by reason, and to ensure at least that every ruler was a philosopher, and every courtier noble in mind and manners as well as in blood. The three English queens of the sixteenth century, Lady Jane Grey, Mary of impious memory, and Good Queen Bess, were all scholars, learned, if not expert, in Latin and Greek ; and if Queen Mary beguiled her leisure hours with annotating the political writings of Aristotle and Machiavelli, Elizabeth read her Greek Testament every morning before embarking on the

daily round of reception, ceremonial, sport and dance ; and was sufficiently skilled in living tongues to converse with ambassadors and visitors in French, Italian, Spanish, German, and, *mirabile dictu*, Scotch. Learning became fashionable, and imaginative literature was enthroned not only as a means of culture, but also as a mode of manners, "to fashion a gentleman in virtuous and gentle discipline"—to instruct as well as to delight. The Elizabethan ideal of culture was so broad that it included martial exercises, sports, music and art, as well as the grammar, mathematics, and logic of the schools ; and regarded foreign travel—particularly to France, Italy and Germany—as the keystone of the arch of learning and manners. The finished gentleman—the Sidney or Raleigh of the age—was a scholar with all his individual faculties and private virtues fully developed. He was in Elyot's phrase "good for somewhat," as soldier or adventurer, as poet, musician, or devoted lover. When Ophelia laments Hamlet's cruelty in the lines :

"O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown :  
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword ;  
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,"

she is attributing to him that rose-like perfection which was the current ideal of the educated gentleman.

To an age which thought so highly of nobility in action, of imagination and eloquence, of elegance of speech, manners and dress, drama was a natural and indeed an inevitable expression of the "form and pressure" of the age. The Elizabethans needed dramatic representation as a picture of historical and heroic action, and as a school of manners. Having no drama but the outworn mediæval moralities and interludes, they proceeded to imitate the Latin tragedies of Seneca and the comedies of Plautus and



Terence. These scholarly attempts never captured the taste of the age, but they influenced the form and spirit of popular drama ; they gave it certain types of character, they gave it five acts, blank verse, and witty prose. They contributed to the general appetite for drama, which, growing by what it fed on, led to the establishment of theatres erected by private enterprise for the performance of more popular plays. The public theatres rose in obedience to the demand for the new type of entertainment, and their rise in turn created professional actors and professional dramatists who, urged and curbed by popular taste, gradually arrived at the types of drama which we now know as Elizabethan history, comedy, tragedy, and tragi-comedy.

" The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,  
And they who live to please must please to live."

## II

### THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRES

THE theatres of London were not built in a day. It was only very gradually that the old moralities and interludes were displaced in the halls of the learned by comedies like *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and by tragedies such as *Gorboduc* (1562). When sometime between 1570 and 1580 the drama became a fashionable craze, it was still homeless, and the transference of popular drama from the yards of inns, and from bear-gardens and cockpits to the public theatres took ten or fifteen years to accomplish. When Queen Elizabeth came to the throne there was not one theatre in London; when she died there were at least three public and two private theatres.

Why there should have been this passion for drama is a complex problem which admits of many solutions. The people did not in the first place discover the new form of art, but once it had been developed they found that it supplied a need. In Elizabethan times one great avenue to fame and preferment, outside the court and within, was poetry. Science, journalism and politics as yet presented no assured career. The coming of the first theatre offered to those university wits, who desired a less regular life than the academic or the clerical, a new profession. They turned to drama, and brought it out of banqueting halls and courtyards. They made it poetic and they made it truly popular, as fit for nobles, lawyers, poets, trades-



men, apprentices, as for the Court itself. The history of the Elizabethan stage is a branch of archæology with ramifications stretching out into the social and political history, biography, architecture, literature and music of the age. In this short description we can only hope to look at its main features so far as they affect the life and works of Shakespeare.

The custom in Tudor times was that actors were nominally, if not actually, the servants of noblemen. The feudal ideal of the age disliked masterless men, and it was an easy matter for magistrates who disliked actors and acting to prosecute players under the laws directed against rogues and vagabonds. The harsh penalties of these acts compelled the early actors to seek the patronage of some nobleman. They became his "servants," and wore his livery or his badge. They travelled about the country seeking the permission of municipalities to perform in provincial towns, but naturally their best pitch was London, the centre of national life, of wealth and population. Here, when not playing for their patrons or at Court, they acted publicly in the yards of certain taverns.

The city regarded the players with no friendly eye. In the eye of the law they were little better than rogues or vagabonds. To the Puritan mind plays were the occasion of frays and quarrels, a menace to morality, and an incentive to luxury and vice. And so for a long time the Council of the City of London attempted to regulate the performance of stage plays within its jurisdiction. These efforts culminated in an Act of Common Council of December 6, 1574, which imposed a censorship on all plays acted in London, and regulated the places of performance. On the other hand, the Privy Council of the Queen was interested in the political aspect of drama, in its possible tendency towards heresy and sedition, its possibilities as a disturber of the public order, and as a means of infection and contagion during outbreaks of the



plague. And since the members of the Privy Council were noblemen and often patrons of drama, they were equally interested in maintaining drama in London, not only as a public recreation and amusement, but also in the interests of Court performances, which were furnished by the very actors whom the city disliked. For some time there was a conflict of wills, the city attempting to control performances and players, the Privy Council seeking to allow actors to perform in the city, subject to the censorship of the Master of the Revels, an official of the Lord Chamberlain's department. The struggle centred round the Earl of Leicester's players who, not content with his certificate stating that they were his household servants, obtained through his influence a patent from the Master of the Revels, dated May 10, 1574, authorizing them to perform publicly. The City replied with their act of censorship in December, which led to the founding of the first theatre.

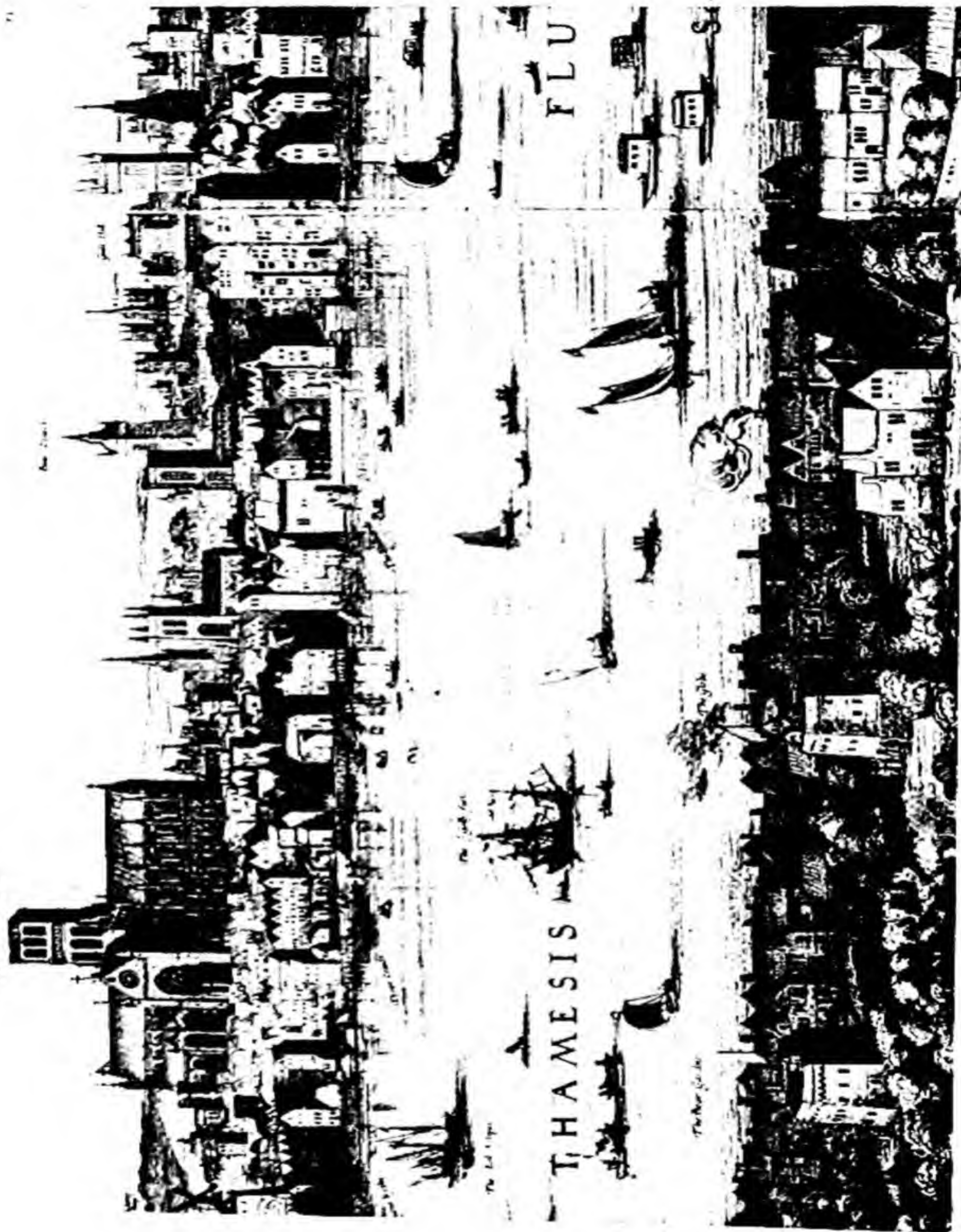
Dissatisfied with the constraints imposed by the City Council, the players erected wooden playbooths, temporary structures modelled to some extent on the yard in which they had performed, and they erected them in the suburbs outside the jurisdiction of the city. The first theatre was built in 1576, but the struggle still went on. In 1581 the Court patrons of drama empowered, by Royal Letters Patent, the Master of the Revels to "order and reform, authorize, and put down" plays, players and playmakers. The City countered this move by a precept of the Lord Mayor, dated April 3, 1582, which forbade all freemen to permit their employees to visit plays either in the city or in the suburbs; whereupon the Privy Council, this time in definite but courteous terms, again asked the Lord Mayor to allow the players to act in London, but without effect.

The refusal of the City to encourage actors and acting largely contributed to the development of



drama, by giving it a home, and by forcing it to seek patronage. The new theatres needed new plays, and a new profession arose, that of the "playmaker" or dramatist. University wits like Peele and Marlowe, pamphleteers like Greene, Nash and Dekker, poets like Shakespeare and Chapman, and scholars like Jonson, sprang to supply the need. Not content with dramatizing their own original fictions, they ransacked histories, French and Italian novels, and the classics, in search of subject matter for new plays to be added to the repertory of the company for which they wrote. Plays were changed daily, and there were no "long runs," though favourite plays were repeated and revived from time to time. The companies of actors which served the new theatres still took nominal service with nobles of the Court, and, as the Lord Chamberlain's, the Earl of Worcester's, the Lord Admiral's, etc., they survived the opposition of the City; and, finally, after the accession of James I in 1603, these three companies were established by Royal Letters Patent as the King's, the Queen's and Prince Henry's players, ranking as servants of the royal household, described as "Grooms of the Chamber," with liberty to act publicly, subject to the censorship of the Crown, except on Sundays, in Lent, and during outbreaks of plague.

The first public theatres, the *Theatre* and the *Curtain*, came into a ramshackle existence of posts and struts, planks and rafters, in the fields beyond Bishopsgate to the north of London, in or about 1576. The first builder of playhouses was James Burbage, variously described as a joiner and as a horse-keeper. The *Curtain* was built in partnership by Burbage and Henry Lanman. The *Theatre* was managed by James Burbage until his death in 1597, and afterwards by his sons Cuthbert and Richard, until a greedy landlord drove them to migrate in the winter of 1598 to fresh pastures. It was at the *Theatre*, in all likelihood,



THE GLOBE THEATRE  
(From Visscher's View of London, 1616)



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that Shakespeare served his apprenticeship to the theatrical profession. The success of Burbage's theatres brought others into being, notably a theatre near the archery ground at Newington, south of the river, and the *Swan* (1595) in Paris Garden, opposite Blackfriars. In the spring of 1599 Cuthbert and Richard Burbage built the *Globe* theatre near Henslowe's *Rose* theatre (1587) on Bankside, and migrated thither with their company, the Lord Chamberlain's, known after 1603 as the King's Company. The *Globe* became the head-quarters of this company, of which Shakespeare was a member and shareholder, and for its stage his tragedies and later comedies were written. In 1613 it was accidentally burned down, but it was rebuilt. Another famous theatre was the *Fortune* (1600) in Cripplegate, the scene of the triumphs of Richard Burbage's great rival as a tragic actor, Edward Alleyn. Here the Lord Admiral's Company acted, or, as they were known after 1603, Prince Henry's Company.

Viewed from a distance the Elizabethan theatres looked like the squat keeps of mediæval castles, almost as high as broad, and dotted with small windows. Built of timber, they differed slightly in detail. The *Globe* and the *Swan* were polygonal in ground plan, the *Fortune* was square; yet certain conventions were followed in all. Their common features were, firstly, the play-booth, namely a roofed house used both as dressing-rooms and as a store-house for dresses, properties and musical instruments; secondly, a stage erected in front of the play-booth and extending about half-way across a circular arena or pit open to the sky; and, lastly, surrounding the pit and stage on three sides, the grandstands or galleries, roofed with thatch or tiles. Obviously these Elizabethan stages differed greatly from ours. The stage with which we are familiar never projects beyond the limits of the boxes and side galleries. It is, moreover, framed by a



proscenium arch and footlights. Scenery is its background. The actors on this stage are seen like living pictures in a looking-glass. But the Elizabethan stage was a platform erected between the side galleries. It was not entirely restricted to one end of the theatre ; it occupied half the floor of the pit. Elizabethan actors might be seen not only from the front of the stage, but also from the sides by the occupants of the galleries and by the "groundlings" who stood in the pit between the galleries and the stage. There was no curtain in front of the stage and no scenery behind it. There were no footlights, nor were they needed, for dramatic performances in the public theatres were given by daylight in theatres open to the sky. The origin of the pit and galleries is to be found in the courtyards of inns surrounded by galleries, such as the White Hart Inn, in the Borough High Street, where Mr. Pickwick first made the acquaintance of that Launcelot Gobbo of the early nineteenth century, Mr. Samuel Weller. The pits of the Elizabethan theatres were known as "yards" or "cockpits." The stage, therefore, probably represented a temporary platform erected by strolling players in such a yard or cockpit. The pits were circular because a ring is the formation natural to the onlookers of some show. It allows an equal view to the greatest number of spectators. Prices of admission were low. In 1599 the pit was one penny, the playgoer paid another penny for admission to the twopenny rooms or galleries, and a third penny for the privilege of sitting in a box upon a cushion. But later the price of the boxes appears to have been raised to sixpence and a shilling.

An Elizabethan stage then was a platform in a pit. Behind it stood the play-booth, or tiring-house, to which two doors, one on each side of the platform, gave inway. Here foregathered the actors with their "book-holder" or prompter, their dresser or "tire-man," and their musicians. Hither came the drama-



tists of the company to criticize the acting and production. Hither also to hobnob with the actors came those of the nobility and gentry who accepted dedications and patronized poets and players. For some of the actors were men of genius; Richard Burbage, for example, who acted Shylock and created the stage tradition of Hamlet, might have become a famous portrait painter had he not been the first actor of his age. Inside the tiring-house, flights of stairs ascended to an upper room fronted by a balcony over the platform. Over this balcony, supported by two pillars rising from the platform, projected from the wall of the play-booth a sloping roof known as "the heavens," which acted both as a covering and as a sounding-board. Under the balcony, between the side doors by which the players entered and left the platform, was a recess or inner chamber, described in stage directions as "within." It was probably normally concealed from view by a "traverse," a pair of curtains which hung from a cornice beneath the balcony. If occasion demanded, the curtains were drawn aside and this room became part of the stage.

Thus, by accident rather than design, an Elizabethan stage was not unlike a Roman comedy stage, which represented a stone house or temple fronted by a long narrow platform representing a street. The Elizabethan stage consisted of a house (the play-booth) fronted by an open place (the platform), and though most of the action of an Elizabethan play was performed on the platform, yet the house could also be used. The balcony and the recess especially were employed if a scene "above" or "within" was required. Hence, it is usual to say that there were three main parts of an Elizabethan stage—the platform, the balcony, and the recess. In some plays all were in use. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* the main action of the play was presented on the platform, but Juliet's balcony would be the balcony of the

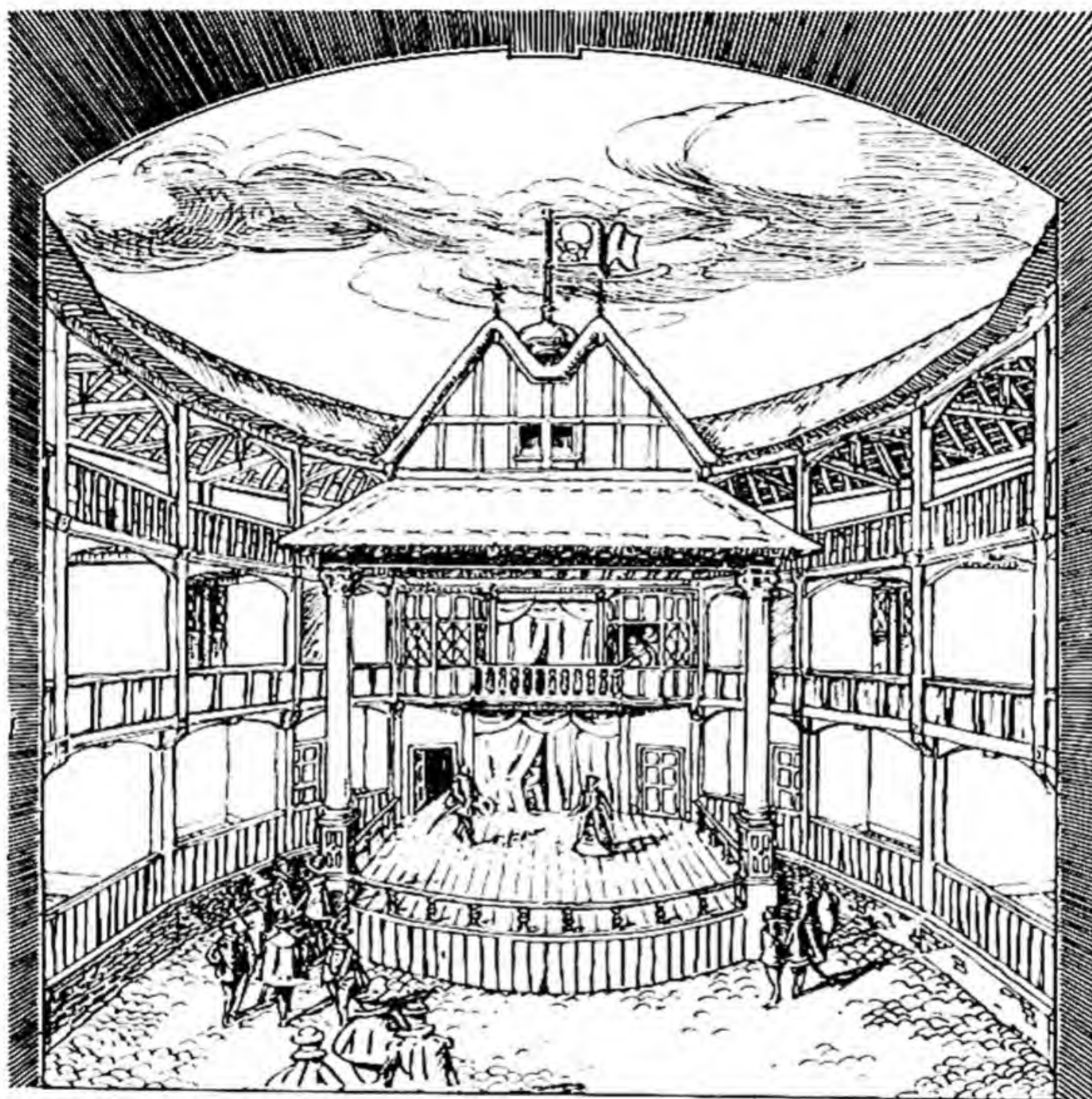


play-booth, and the recess would serve as the tomb of the Capulets.

Sometimes the play-booth represented a town. For instance, in *Coriolanus*, Act I, Sc. iv, the house represented Corioli. The balcony was "the walls" upon which the Volscians came to parley with the Romans. One of the side doors of the stage represented "the gates." Through it the Volscians made a sortie and drove back the Romans. Through it again Marcius drove back the Volscians and was shut in with them. From the balcony the citizen of Angiers addressed the rival kings of England and France in *King John* (Act II, Sc. i), the stage doors representing the gates of Angiers, to which the heralds of France and England in the same scene advanced "with trumpets." From the balcony also Gloucester, accompanied by two bishops, addressed the citizens of London in the scene at Baynard's Castle (*Richard III*, Act III, Sc. vii). The recess was often used to indicate an interior. It would serve, for example, as the scene of Desdemona's bedchamber. It would stand for the hovel on the heath in *King Lear*, and the "neighbouring room" to which Hamlet lugged Polonius. It would be Christopher Sly's bedroom in the induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*. Possibly it was used as the scene of the play within the play of *Hamlet*.

A precise idea of the plan of an Elizabethan theatre is given in the builder's specification of *The Fortune*, Cripplegate, erected by Edward Alleyn and Philip Henslowe in 1600, burnt down in 1621. *The Fortune* was square in shape, and built of wood and plaster upon a foundation of piles and concrete. The platform was 43 feet wide, and extended  $27\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the play-booth across the pit, from which it was fenced by a railing. The roofless pit was 55 feet square, so that there were strips of standing room 6 feet wide on each side of the platform. In the rear of the platform stood the play-booth with glazed windows and a tiled





THE GLOBE THEATRE

*A conjectural restoration of the stage by G. Topham Forrest*

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roof, from which projected a tiled "heavens," supported by square pilasters rising from the stage. The other three sides of the pit were enclosed by galleries and boxes built in three stories, respectively 12 feet, 11 feet, and 9 feet high from floor level to floor level. The uppermost gallery was roofed with a tiled roof, furnished with a leaden gutter to prevent the rain streaming into the galleries below. The grandstands were 12½ feet deep from front to rear. They were floored with wood and seated with wooden benches. The boxes (rooms) were plastered and ceiled. The outside walls of *The Fortune* were 80 feet square, and the entrance was probably at the rear of the stage by doors on each side of the back wall of the play-booth.

The public theatres had no scenery. The spectators' only clue to a change of scene was the disappearance of the actors from the stage. Hence the need for such devices as the rimed couplet at the end of the scene, and the locality-boards displayed perhaps with each scene. Scenery was precluded by the structure of the play-booth and platform: but other aids to illusion were sought in properties, dress and music. The players' costumes were often highly elaborate, and such movable objects as tables, thrones, chairs, beds, tents and armour were used. They had trap-doors beneath the stage, and a "machine" for hoisting and lowering persons to and from the "heavens." There was no orchestra in our sense of the word; but there was music between the acts, played either in the tiring-house or in a box next to the stage. There were songs in nearly every play. Drummers entered with armies, trumpets sounded "sennets" and flourishes for the entry of important persons, and lutenists came on the stage to accompany the singers of serenades and songs. In *Antony and Cleopatra* (Act IV, Sc. iii) musicians were even sent beneath the platform, like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, to play "infernal music."

It now remains to point out the influence of this



type of stage on the Shakespearian drama. Dramatic realism in Elizabethan theatres was most limited. Playwrights were forced to rely greatly upon the audience's imagination. There was no artificial scenery and no artificial lighting. A beautiful setting, such as modern stage-managers are wont to give us, was unknown. It was impossible in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, to represent Athens, save by a notice-board, ATHENS, displayed on the stage. It was impossible to represent a wood, except by a few property bushes. It was impossible to represent night at all. Elizabethan audiences needed no such props to imagination as our modern stage realists provide in elaborate painted scenes, wind machines, and bird-warblers. The spectators at *The Globe* let it be granted that the stage might symbolize anything—the inside or outside of a house, a street, a garden, a wood, a ship, an island, a city. The stage might represent anywhere—London, Rome, Milan, Athens, the forest of Arden, or the coast of Bohemia. In *Richard III* Shakespeare could even show the rival camps of Richard and Richmond on opposite sides of the platform.

Another effect of this type of stage was that a "picture" or grouping of the actors before the fall of the curtain was out of the question. Actors had either to walk or to be carried off the platform in sight of the spectators. Shakespeare's tragedies usually end with a processional dead march. *Othello* is an exception. It is likely that in this play the recess represented Desdemona's room, and the traverse would be drawn to conceal the bodies of Othello and his unhappy bride. Shakespeare's comedies often end with a song, a dance, or wedding festivities. The histories most nearly approach our custom of the curtain. They end often with a speech by one of the principal actors, whilst the rest form a "picture" around him. Plays written for the modern type of



stage usually end after the completion of the action, or at a point immediately before it is completed. True love is made happy, but the wedding breakfast is left to the imagination. The tragic hero goes to his death, but we are spared the horror of it ; or does the dramatist depict death on the stage, the curtain falls almost before we realize what has happened. The structure of the Elizabethan type of stage forced dramatists almost inevitably to prolong the action beyond the limit of dramatic interest. The song and dance finale of comedy, the funeral procession of tragedy is usually a trifle tame, coming as it does after an interesting or a thrilling climax. 2.

The division of Shakespearian plays into " acts " is merely formal. The unit of the plays is the scene. Nevertheless, their division into acts for the readers' benefit is justified. It serves to bracket a group of related scenes together, or to indicate a lapse of time ; but it can have had little meaning in actual presentation, except when a pause in the action was indicated by music or a dance. Elizabethan plays consist of consecutive scenes, and the end of an act is just like the end of any other scene—the actors simply walk off the stage, leaving it empty.

It is necessary to remember that there were no actresses on the Elizabethan stage. It is doubtful whether actresses appeared on the English stage until the Restoration. Women's parts were played by boys, the apprentices to the players. Some of them were singers. Ariel's songs in *The Tempest*, the fairy songs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Desdemona's " willow " song were sung by boys ; so were the pages' songs in *As You Like It* and the dirge in *Cymbeline*. There was often one singing man in a company. The parts of Balthasar in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Amiens in *As You Like It* were taken by a singer.

The foregoing description of the Elizabethan stage



applies to the public theatres; but there were also private theatres, or halls with platforms, where dramatic performances were given. These theatres had more elaborate incidental music than the public theatres. They had also scenery, consisting at least of wings and painted back-cloths. They had footlights, for plays were performed in half-darkness. Performances were given by companies of boys, such as the choristers of the Chapel Royal, of St. Paul's, and the Children of the Revels. For a time there was keen rivalry between the companies of boys who acted at *Blackfriars* and *Whitefriars*, and the companies of men who performed at the *Globe*, the *Rose* and the *Fortune*. Strange it seems that mature plays, such as *Eastward Ho*, *The Malcontent*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *The Silent Woman*, were acted by immature and squeaky boys with never a girl to act a woman's part. The chief private theatre was *Blackfriars Theatre*, opened in 1576, by Richard Farrant, the deputy master of the Children of the Chapel Royal. It was a room in the old frater of the monastery in which dramatic performances were given by the Children of the Chapel Royal. This venture came to an end in 1584. The second *Blackfriars Theatre*, in another part of the conventual buildings, was constructed by James Burbage in 1596, just before his death, and leased by his son to Henry Evans who was connected with the Children of the Chapel Royal, and with the Revels, from 1600 to 1608. After the suppression of the Children's Company in 1608, Burbage leased *Blackfriars* to himself and six other members of the King's Company. Shakespeare owned one share. The *Blackfriars Theatre* was the most prominent private theatre. It remained in use until it was closed on the outbreak of the Civil War. Plays of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher and others were performed there. Its name appears on the title page of more than fifty published plays,



and doubtless many plays acted there remained unpublished.

Other theatres of this type were *Whitefriars* and the theatre of the Children of St. Paul's. The term "private" applied to them appears to have been a legal fiction. It was assumed that the performances were given at a private house before guests, and as the Act of Common Council of 1574 exempted from the City's censorship plays given in the private houses of noblemen and citizens, the performances were freed from the restrictions and penalties against public dramatic entertainments within the city. But these theatres were "private" also in the sense that the audience was select. No apprentices fought here for bitten apples. The price of the seats, ranging from sixpence to half a crown, prohibited admission except to people of wealth and leisure.

But the most elaborate private performances were those given by the London companies by special command at Court at Whitehall, Greenwich, or Hampton Court. For these, under the direction of the Master of the Revels, a platform was erected at one end of the great hall, and the plays of Shakespeare and others were acted in magnificent dresses and with elaborate scenery. The Court stage was built up in sections or "houses" to fit the scenes of the play, with painted scenery and profuse properties. As the play progressed the actors moved from one house to another according to the locality of the scene. This imitation of the French method of staging appears to have been one of the peculiarities of the private theatres, but it was unknown in the public theatres, for which Shakespeare's plays, with the possible exception of *The Tempest*, were written.

### III

## THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

**M**OST of the few recorded facts of Shakespeare's life have survived either in the faded leaves of old registers or on the title pages of printed quartos. No biography was attempted until some generations after his death, when it was too late to record the forgotten past. Any modern reconstruction of Shakespeare's life is like an attempt to piece together the fragments of a shattered old stained-glass window. Some of the pieces have survived—the form of others we can guess; but the vast majority are lost beyond repair. The picture may be reconstructed in its main outline, but there are dark gaps for which conjecture has no restoration. And restoration is made more difficult by the fact that originally the existing fragments belonged to more than one window. There were at least two William Shakespeares.

William Shakespeare, actor and dramatist, was born at his father's house in Henley Street, Stratford-on-Avon, probably on April 23, and was baptized in the parish church on April 26, 1564. The parish register describes him as the son of John Shakespeare—the name was pronounced Shacksper or Shackspeare<sup>1</sup>—and as far as can be discovered this John Shakespeare was a farmer of Snitterfield, who moved to Stratford about 1551 and engaged in business as a

<sup>1</sup> The name is variously spelt Shakespeare, Shakspere, Shakspeare, Shagspere, and Shaxberd.



dealer in various kinds of agricultural produce. Tradition describes him both as a butcher and as a buyer and seller of wool. As a produce dealer he became prosperous enough to become an alderman, and in 1568, the High Bailiff, or Mayor, of Stratford. He died on September 8, 1601, and was buried in the churchyard. His wife Mary, the poet's mother, came of Warwickshire yeoman stock, being the daughter of Robert Arden, a small landowner at Wilmcote, about three miles from Stratford. She died in 1608. William was the eldest surviving child, two sisters having died before he was born. There were three brothers, Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund, an actor who died December 29, 1607, and was buried in St. Saviour's, Southwark; and a sister named Joan, five years younger, who married William Hart, of Stratford, and lived to be seventy-seven.

We know little of Shakespeare's childhood. Probably he attended between the ages of seven and fourteen Stratford Grammar School. Here he would study Lily's Latin Grammar, the common textbook of Elizabethan grammar schools. He appears also from the internal evidence of his plays to have read Mantuan's *Eclogues*,<sup>1</sup> Livy's *History*, Book I, and possibly also he made the acquaintance of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, and the *Æneid* of Virgil.

He would leave school in 1577 or 1578. Most probably he helped his father. One tradition records that when it was his duty to kill an ox, he did it whilst declaiming impassioned verse. Another tradition avers that he was a schoolmaster. We know nothing of Shakespeare between childhood and eighteen, and if we wish to conjecture, we may imagine the gifted youth retained by some school-

<sup>1</sup> The *Bucolica* of Baptista Spagnolo (1448-1516), surnamed Mantuano, from Mantua, his native city. His eclogues were frequently read in Elizabethan grammar schools. Shakespeare quotes him in *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, ii, 96-103.



master for a time as a sort of pupil teacher, and then taken away from school by his father to follow trade at home. The next step is sudden. Shakespeare married in haste and repented at leisure. At the age of eighteen and a half, in November 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, of Shottery, his elder by seven years. The motive and the facts are obscure. No register of the marriage is known, but there exists a bond in the Registry of Worcester, the bishopric to which Stratford and Shottery belong, made by two friends of the bride's to secure the Bishop from liability in issuing a marriage licence for William Shagspere and Anne Hathwey, "with once asking of the banns of matrimony between them." Further it would appear that this hasty marriage was made without the consent of his parents. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a small farmer of Shottery, near Stratford; and the marriage, judging by allusions in the plays (e.g. *Twelfth Night*, II, iv, 30-38; *Tempest*, IV, i, 14-23) appears to have been unhappy. A daughter, Susanna, was baptized in Stratford Church on May 26, 1583; and twins, Hamnet and Judith, christened after friends of Shakespeare in Stratford named Hamnet and Judith Sadler, were baptized on February 2, 1586.<sup>1</sup> Hamnet died at the age of ten. Susanna married on June 5, 1607, Dr. John Hall, of Stratford, a Puritan, and lived until 1649. Judith married an innkeeper of Stratford, named Thomas Quiney, on February 10, 1616, just before her father's death, and lived until 1662.

For three years or so after his wedding Shakespeare appears to have lived with his new family under his father's roof, assisting in the paternal business, but nothing is known of him until August 1592, when there is an allusion made by the dramatist Robert Greene, in a pamphlet called "Greene's

<sup>1</sup> 1585 in Elizabethan reckoning, for the New Year began, until 1752, on March 25th.





SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE (BEFORE RESTORATION)

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Groatsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance," which can scarcely refer to anyone but the young Shakespeare, now an actor in London and botcher of plays. "Yes, trust them not" (the actors); "for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide*,<sup>1</sup> supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." It is not a complimentary allusion, and we can only conjecture that jealousy was its cause.

Shakespeare appears to have left Stratford in 1586 or 1587 to try his luck in London. Tradition records that he walked, and that having arrived in London with the proverbial shilling in his pocket, he obtained employment in some humble capacity at one of the two theatres, the *Theatre*, or the *Curtain*. Whether it was domestic unhappiness that drove Shakespeare from Stratford and home, or, as tradition avers, a feud with Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote, who appears to be caricatured in Justice Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, we know not. It may have been simply a desire to succeed as an actor, long fought against, and finally triumphant. Shakespeare may have developed a passion for the stage after seeing strolling players perform in Stratford, or he may have had actor friends in London. This episode in Shakespeare's life is very obscure.

With the exception of occasional visits to Stratford, and possibly of short tours as a strolling player in the provinces, Shakespeare spent the next twenty-five years in London. He came to it, an auburn youth, in the early twenties. He left it, a bald and middle-aged gentleman, at the age of forty-five or six. During the greater part of this time he was connected with the stage as an actor and a play-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 3 *Henry VI*, I, iv, 137.



wright, and later as a shareholder as well. Greene's allusion was made in 1592, and bears witness to the ill will and perhaps envy which the success of the new-comer had aroused in at least one breast. The venom of the shaft was neutralized by Greene's editor, the fat and jolly Henry Chettle, printer and dramatist, who, in his pamphlet "Kind Heart's Dream," written a little later in the same year, certified to Shakespeare's "uprightness of dealing," which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing that approves his Art,"—so that there were friends in these early London days, as well as foes.

Shakespeare's early connection with the stage is obscure. It is possible that he was a member of Henslowe's companies at the Rose, Lord Strange's players in 1592, the Earl of Pembroke's in 1593, and the Earl of Sussex's in 1594. The early plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI*, parts I, II and III, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, seem to have been written for one or other of these companies. What is certain is that he was an actor in the company managed by the Burbages, which acted at the *Theatre*, the *Curtain*, and after 1599 at the *Globe*, and was under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain from 1594 to 1603, and then, on the accession of James I, was by Royal Letters Patent appointed to be the King's Company. After 1609 the company used the *Blackfriars* theatre as its winter quarters. The *Globe* was burnt down in 1613, and rebuilt, but it is probable that the prompt copies of Shakespeare's unpublished plays were lost in the fire. Shakespeare became a partner in both the *Globe* and *Blackfriars* theatres, holding a tenth share, which afterwards was reduced to a fourteenth in the *Globe*, and a share of one seventh in the profits of *Blackfriars*. He lived at first in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, so as to be near the *Theatre* and the *Curtain*, which were outside the city walls in Finsbury fields. When acting on the Surrey side he appears



to have lodged in Southwark. During the winter of 1592-3 the theatres were closed by reason of the plague, and it has been suggested that, like many later poets, Shakespeare took the opportunity of visiting Italy in search of culture. This is a happy supposition, but needless to say it is mere conjecture. There is not a shred of evidence to prove that Shakespeare ever visited Italy. It seems much more likely that during this period of enforced leisure he turned his poetic talents to the production of narrative poems. In 1593 Richard Field, a native of Stratford, who had come to London about 1580, published Shakespeare's first book, a quarto edition of the poem *Venus and Adonis*, with the haughty motto, chosen from the *Amores* of Ovid, I, xv, 35 :

*"Vilia miretur vulgus : mihi flavus Apollo  
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua."*

Dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, a youthful and liberal patron of poetry and drama, the poem was successful in pleasing the poetic taste of the day, and went through eight or more editions between 1593 and 1620. *Venus and Adonis* was followed in 1594 by *Lucrece*, also dedicated to Southampton. Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, was a friend and supporter of the Earl of Essex, one of the most powerful nobles in England from 1587, when he ousted Raleigh from the Queen's favour, until his failure in the Irish campaign of 1599. Both poems treat of the contrast between chastity and lust in a way that shows Shakespeare's interest in the ethical aspect of ungoverned passion, as well as his delight in the human interest of myth and legend in their pictorial setting.

Some of Shakespeare's leisure was spent in adapting old-fashioned plays for a stage where dramatic taste changed very quickly. The plays of 1580 were antiquated in form and style in 1590, and many of Shakespeare's early dramatic works are revisions of

N. J. ...

older plays. Probably *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice* were based on old plays. Certainly 2 *Henry VI*, 3 *Henry VI*, *King John*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* were revisions of earlier anonymous plays. On the other hand *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, appear to be original creations, or at least no single source for them has been found, though their absolute originality has been disputed.

We know little of Shakespeare's life as an actor. His name appears in the cast of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), where perhaps he played Old Knowell, and doubtless he acted in his own plays. Tradition says that "the top of his performance was the ghost in his own *Hamlet*." He is reported, by a tradition attributed to "one of Shakespeare's younger brothers" by William Oldys (1696-1761), to have played Old Adam in *As You Like It*; and a later recorded stage tradition has it that Shakespeare once, in a court performance of *Henry V*, acted the part of the French King, Charles VI. In Act II, Sc. iv, he ended his speech by turning to Queen Elizabeth as he uttered the lines:

" This is a stem  
Of that victorious stock; and let us fear  
The native mightiness and fate of *her*."

Whereupon the Queen dropped her glove as a token of her appreciation. The messenger entered, saying:

" Ambassadors from Harry King of England  
Do crave admittance to your Majesty,"—

whereupon Shakespeare, walking towards the glove, answered:

" We'll give them present audience. Go and bring  
them";



and then added *ex tempore* :

" Though now engaged with this high embassy  
Stoop we to lift our cousin England's glove."

If not true, the story is at least characteristic. It was parts of this kind, secondary but dignified and serious parts, which he seems to have played, and in the lists of actors his name appears near the head of the list. It would be pleasant to think that, having attained comfortable prosperity as an actor and a dramatist, Shakespeare sent for his wife and family to live with him in London ; but of that we possess no hint. It was at Stratford on May 26, 1583, that Susanna, eldest daughter of William Shakespeare, was baptized. It was at Stratford in February 1586 that the twins Hamnet and Judith were baptized ; and it was at Stratford, in August 1596, that young Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, was buried.

It is more profitable, since speculation is essential, to consider the schooling which the dramatist gave himself. From boyhood he had been endowed with a keen sense of observation. The London stage sharpened his eye for men's habits, feelings and behaviour, and taught him to think dramatically in terms of human emotion. He learned to look within himself and to read the thoughts of others there. One can trace in his plays, as he goes on from strength to strength, a keener appreciation of what differentiates one man from another, differences and contrasts of thought, of temperament, of conscience. In this school he learned his knowledge of the human heart. But with the clamour for more plays came the need for a wide survey of literature. Shakespeare read widely.

It was the humour of eighteenth-century critics to decry Shakespeare's knowledge of literature. He was supposed—by Rowe for example, by Voltaire in France, and by Dr. Blair in Scotland, who ought to

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have known better—to have been a rude untutored genius, ignorant of classical models, unable to mould his plots according to the unities of action, time, and place, and unfurnished with the scholarship necessary to garnish his verses with elegant “imitations” of the classical authors—like Ben Jonson. Yet dramatic criticism and plot construction must have been common topics of conversation at the *Mermaid Inn* and the *Devil Tavern*. Jonson's friendship, or shall we call it rivalry, must have been an education in itself. It was probably under Jonson's influence that Shakespeare drew the conception of humours like Jaques, Sir Toby Belch, Aguecheek, Lucio and Parolles. Jonson must have expounded the unities to Shakespeare. Or, if we assume that he failed ever to discuss this vexed question, Shakespeare was surely familiar with Sidney's plea for the unities uttered in his *Apology for Poetry*, written about 1580, though not published until 1595. Jonson's extensive and peculiar acquaintance with the ancients was rivalled only by professed scholars. To him Shakespeare appeared to have “little Latin and less Greek.” Their conversation must have been most entertaining. Ben was learned, and somewhat pedantic. William was modest, intelligent and merely well read. Jonson's taste was for realism, and for those simple types of character in which one dominant trait is emphasized. Shakespeare loved romance, and those complex individuals in whom will is at war with heart, or those rich natures who ripen by experience from a simple to a complex personality. What arguments they must have had over their profound cups! And that Shakespeare was not too superior to profit by Ben Jonson's criticism is apparent from that famous verse in *Julius Cæsar*, ridiculed by Jonson in *Timber* as “Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause”—which appears in the revised version of the folio as—



" Know, Cæsar doth not wrong, nor without cause  
Will he be satisfied."

If Shakespeare constructed and versified his dramas in his own English way, it must have been because he realized that no attempt, whether by realism or unities, to override the artificiality of drama and make it pass for actual life, can possibly succeed and yet remain art; and because he would rather bring forth verses from his own overflowing store than steal them from other men's barns. Shakespeare's reading, as revealed by his works, was wide in fathom if not deep. He had a fair acquaintance with the best known Roman poets, especially with Virgil and Ovid. A copy of the *Metamorphoses*, signed with his name, is to be found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.<sup>1</sup> He read Plutarch's *Lives* in North's translation. He appears to have been an omnivorous reader of modern prose and poetry. He parodied Rabelais, and borrowed from Montaigne. He burrowed in historical chronicles, and was familiar not only with Chaucer, and the Elizabethan writers of songs and sonnets, but with Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Lodge's *Rosalynde*, Greene's *Pandosto*, and a host of the gallant inventions of his age.

As a dramatist, Shakespeare found his true bent in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a not very important play, but interesting in the development of his art as a boundary is interesting. It is not to be compared to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was written about the same time (1595?), for poetry and fantasy; nor is it as witty nor as laughable as *Love's Labour's Lost*. But it marks the beginning of those Shakespearian comedies in which human character is presented with such power that the interest it creates becomes as prominent as that roused by the tangle of the plot. It is the first comedy in which

<sup>1</sup> The authenticity of this signature has been doubted.



appear the typical comedy heroine, a noble loyal maiden with a resourceful and practical mind, and the typical comedy hero, an ardent, soldierly, and only slightly less noble youth. It was the first comedy in which Shakespeare represented the heroine masquerading as a man. *Romeo and Juliet* was his earliest successful attempt to dramatize a tragic story. Its hero and heroine are the victims of a web of unlucky circumstance. As in the early comedies, its interest lies in the romantic charm of the story rather than in the characterization. It has the same romantic atmosphere as the early comedies, coupled with the charm of innocence, and the pathos of blighted happiness. Like *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the *Comedy of Errors*, it was a unique experiment. Shakespeare never again attempted this mode of tragedy. After serving his apprenticeship to drama, during which period the "histories," *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *King John* were composed, Shakespeare turned to the writing of comedy. By 1596 he had discovered the art of depicting human character in a situation calculated to reveal its emotions. He had learned to restrain the exuberance of his fancy, and to avoid the most obvious kinds of verbal wit. He had discovered that minor characters in drama take on an added interest when they play a part in the development of the action. Henceforth he devoted greater care to the characterization of small parts. Typical plays written between 1596 and 1601 are *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, unique as Shakespeare's only attempt at comedy in an English setting, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare's finest work in comedy was written at this time, and it is interesting to note that comedy, in "the conceited mirth of Sir John Falstaff," penetrates into the histories which were written



during this period, namely *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

Shakespeare's increasing fame is indicated by the honourable mention of his name in 1598 by a critic named Francis Meres in a slim volume on the subject of contemporary poetry entitled *Palladis Tamia*. He says: "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in the mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare: witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared Sonnets among his private friends, etc."

"As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For Comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labour's Lost*, his *Love Labour's Won*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*. For Tragedy, his *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

"As Epilus Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus's tongue, if they would speak Latin; so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if they would speak English." This makes it certain that the works included in this list were written before 1598.

His waxing prosperity is reflected in his business transactions. On October 20, 1596, John Shakespeare, the poet's father, applied to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms. This application could scarcely have been made without the knowledge of his son William, who on May 4, 1597, bought for £60 New Place, one of the largest houses in Stratford, from William Underhill. And after some delay the grant was made in 1599 by the pliable William Dethick, Garter King at Arms, "for the encouragement of his posterity," and henceforward Shakespeare was entitled to bear as his heraldic blazon a golden spear on a bend sable, with a falcon supporting a



spear as crest, and to flaunt the challenging motto, "Non sanz droict." In 1598 Shakespeare went to lodge with a French Protestant refugee, a wig maker, named Montjoy, in a house at the corner of Monkwell Street and Silver Street off Cheapside in the City of London. He became a friend of the family, and interested himself in arranging the marriage of the daughter of the house. Here most probably he continued to stay until his final return to Stratford. Here *Henry V* was written, and here evidently he picked up the scraps of French which he introduced into that play. Perhaps here also he first heard the story of Hamlet from Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. In 1599 he became one of the original shareholders in the *Globe Theatre*, where the Lord Chamberlain's Company played. Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, the founder of his good estate by gifts amounting to £1,000, if the tradition of Davenant is credible, was imprisoned in the Tower in February 1601 for participation in that desperate uprising hatched by Essex, which cost the leader his head. A play of *Richard II*, which may have been Shakespeare's, was acted before the malcontents on the eve of the outbreak, February 7, 1601, by the actors from the Globe. The actors escaped punishment, but Southampton was imprisoned until the accession of James I in 1603.

Possibly Shakespeare went on tour with the company from time to time. Probably he went home every year to Stratford. He would have legal business to attend to after the death of his father in September 1601. He would certainly be present at the marriage of his daughter Susanna to Dr. Hall at Stratford on June 5, 1607; and no doubt at his mother's funeral on September 9, 1608. The events of this part of Shakespeare's life are hidden. Probably there were few events except work and social gatherings. We have no information that Shake-



speare ever went duck-shooting to Hackney Marshes, or coursed the hare on Hampstead Heath. We do not even know that he smoked. Unlike Ben Jonson, he never mentions tobacco in his plays. He may have liked his sack well sugared. Drummond said of Ben Jonson that "drink was one of the elements wherein he lived," but one thinks of Shakespeare as a temperate and rather reserved actor and dramatist. We know that he took part in the ceremonial procession of James I from the Tower to Whitehall on March 15, 1604, walking in procession in a scarlet uniform, together with Richard Burbage, and the rest of the players of the King's Company. And he was one of the twelve actors of the King's Company who by royal command served the Spanish envoy Juan Fernandez de Velasco, Duke of Frias, as valets in attendance, when he visited Somerset House in August 1604 to complete a treaty of peace.

Having proved, in the words of the anonymous preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, that he "never undertook anything comical, vainly . . . showing such a dexterity and power of wit, that the most displeased with plays are pleased with his comedies," Shakespeare turned to the graver sort of drama. The great tragedies were either heralded or accompanied by three dramas which are "comedies" only by lacking the obvious tragic ending. *All's Well that Ends Well* represents the wooing of an aristocratic but ignoble youth by the charming and resourceful woman who is far too good to be wasted on such a vain fellow. It is a mirthless counterpart to *The Taming of the Shrew*, and its title is as unpleasant as its argument. *Measure for Measure* is a finely conceived and finely constructed drama marred by a happy ending. *Troilus and Cressida*, a dramatic version of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, is as incomprehensible to us as to Shakespeare's contemporaries. It is a mirthless inversion of *Romeo and*

*Juliet*, and the most cynical and unsympathetic of the plays.

The great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, are such—

“As neither man nor Muse can praise too much.”

They are individual and inimitable. They stand alone for completeness of imaginative idea, for romantic grandeur, for genius of individual characterization, and for magnificence of style. The minds of *Hamlet* and *Lear* are worlds in themselves, *Othello* is the most pitiful tragedy of malice, *Macbeth* represents the ecstasy of violence and despair. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* surpass in romantic atmosphere, *Othello* and *Lear* in passion and pathos. The Roman historical plays were also written at this time. *Julius Cæsar*, the noblest of them all, was probably written before *Hamlet*. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* followed *Macbeth*. These tragedies, written between 1600 and 1609, are remarkable not only for their vivid and natural characterization, and for their sympathy with men in the throes of passion, but for their ripe wisdom of observation and reflection. What could be simpler or truer than Kent's philosophy in *King Lear*:

“Men must endure  
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;  
Ripeness is all!”

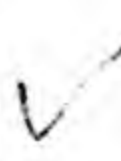
It is the wisdom of all the philosophers distilled in a drop. And there is something comparable in every member of the group of plays. In them Shakespeare's genius rose to the magnitude of the argument, and verged upon the illimitable confines of passion and emotion. Shakespeare during this period wished to depict men and women in scenes which evoked their deepest and scarcely expressible feelings. His technical skill was at its highest. His sense of



structure was developed. His verse attained a power of rhythmical suggestion which he never surpassed. Conception and expression were exactly adapted, each to each.

The *Sonnets*, published in 1609, indicate deep admiration and love of a friend and patron, and the influence of an unknown dark lady upon the poet's life. Neither are known to fame, though they remain immortalized in Shakespeare's mellifluous verses. The *Sonnets* were probably written at various times during the previous twelve years, most of them probably between 1597 and 1600, and their order is arbitrary. They remain in the order of the first edition, but it is uncertain whether this is Shakespeare's arrangement, or even whether they were published with the consent of their author. The mysterious Mr. W. H., to whom the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, wished "that eternity promised by our ever-living poet," remains "the only begetter" of the sonnets, and a phantom. The *Sonnets* are the most obscure and the most fascinating Shakespearean document. Scores of theories as to their meaning have been propounded. If they were the product of genuine and not fictitious feeling, their hidden allusions, had we but the key, would discover more than we know of the life of their author; but it is very possible that many of the sonnets are mere literary exercises, composed in a period when sonnet writing was a fashionable craze. They express a melancholy sweetness which is in character with Shakespeare's thought and feeling during the period of his tragic dramas.

The conjecture has been made that Shakespeare turned to the writing of tragedies owing to private sorrows such as the death of his father, or loss of his patron's favour. But it seems much more reasonable to suppose that, after exhausting his genius for his four or five types of romantic comedy, he turned





deliberately to tragedy with new intent to prove his powers as a serious dramatist. *Twelfth Night* was the high tide of his genius for both comedy and clowning. He has to choose between repeating himself again and again, and taking up a new type of play. Tragedy was not a new mode. He had attempted it with some success earlier in his career, and a period of mental gloom is not commonly associated with *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III* and *Richard II*. Perhaps the play which showed the way to the new world of tragic drama was *Julius Cæsar*. Shakespeare's conception of the character of Brutus gave him the hint for Hamlet. By trial and experiment he discovered the human interest and the dramatic value of an admirable nature wrecked by a tragic error or a false step, in circumstances which are beyond his capacity to control.

Shakespeare exhausted his tragic vein in 1608 or 1609 and reverted to comedy; but it was a new adventure in comedy. *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are more theatrical and less dramatic than their predecessors. They indicate not only that Shakespeare is no longer youthful: they register a change in dramatic taste. Their plots abound in spectacular and semi-tragic situations. Their love-interest is highly sentimental. Yet in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare reached his highest flight of imaginative beauty, and in *The Tempest* his most lofty exposition of philosophic idealism. In what year Shakespeare the actor retired from the stage, sold his shares, and retired to Stratford is not definitely known. Probably he spent more time in Stratford than in London after his mother's death in 1608. Perhaps he lived there almost entirely, though there must have been journeys to London connected with the plays which he wrote in 1612 and 1613 in collaboration with John Fletcher, the admirer



and imitator of Shakespeare in *The Faithful Shepherdess*. Those plays were *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII*, during the performance of the latter of which, on June 29, 1613, the old *Globe Theatre* caught fire and was burned to the ground. It was probably in London, early in 1613, that Shakespeare and Burbage were requested by the Earl of Rutland, a friend of Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, to invent a heraldic device and motto for a tournament which was held at Belvoir Castle on March 31.

Nevertheless tradition gives an idyllic picture of Shakespeare at New Place enjoying "ease, retirement and the conversation of his friends." There was John Combe, steward of the Earl of Warwick, Hamnet Sadler, and a few cronies at the 'Cage' inn, kept by Thomas Quiney. There was no comfortable home-life à la Jane Austen in those times, and if a man wished for ease he took it at his inn. Thither would come also Michael Drayton from his summer quarters with Sir Henry Rainsford at Clifford Chambers only a mile away, and perhaps Ben Jonson came at least once to see him. Shakespeare is reported by tradition to have died of a fever contracted after a merry meeting with Drayton and Jonson. He began to be seriously ill in January 1616, and had his will made. On February 10 his daughter Judith was married to Thomas Quiney the vintner, and it is not unlikely that the festivities hastened his end. Possibly this was the occasion of the visit of Jonson and Drayton to which tradition refers.

Shakespeare's fever grew worse, and when he signed his will on March 25 the hand of death was already upon him. His three signatures are hardly legible. His eldest daughter, Susanna Hall, received New Place and the bulk of his estate. It is possible that Shakespeare's papers passed into her possession and



were destroyed in a fit of Puritan spleen. His silver plate was bequeathed to her daughter Elizabeth. Judith received £150, and a like amount after three years, if certain provisos were complied with. His sister Joan Hart received a life interest in the Henley Street property, the family home, various small bequests, including his clothes, and £5 to each of her sons. Shakespeare bequeathed £10 to the poor of Stratford; money for mourning rings to various friends, including Richard Burbage, John Hemming, and Henry Condell; and to his wife, the Anne Hathaway of his youth, his "second best bed with the furniture." There are no bequests to members of the Hathaway family, and it is obvious that Shakespeare had no great solicitude for his wife; he was content that she should receive merely her legal portion of one-third the real property as a widow, and a bed to lie on. He died in his fifty-third year, on April 23, and was buried in Stratford Church on April 25, 1616. His grave is beneath the floor of the chancel, and the slab bears an inscription designed to prevent his remains being removed to the charnel house to make room for other graves: ✓

" Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here.  
Blest be the man that spares these stones  
And curst be he that moves my bones."

A few years after his death, his family erected the well-known monument on the wall of the chancel of Stratford Church, which consists of a bust and a tablet bearing an inscription in Latin and English.

There are many portraits of Shakespeare, but few are authentic. The Stratford bust was the craftsmanship of Gerrard Johnson, a monumental sculptor of Southwark. Its art is crude, but it is inconceivable that the family would have erected and paid for a bust which bore no resemblance to Shakespeare.





SHAKESPEARE'S MONUMENT IN STRATFORD CHURCH

**Title**

**Author**

**Accession No.**

**Call No.**

**Borrower's  
No.**

**Issue  
Date**

**Borrower's  
No.**

**Issue  
Date**



It was originally coloured, with hazel eyes and auburn beard. Restored in 1748, it was at Malone's suggestion painted white in 1793. The colouring was restored in 1861. It is possible that this bust was carved after a lost portrait of Shakespeare by Burbage. The Droeshout portrait, the print which forms the incredible and unsatisfactory frontispiece to the First Folio (1623), was the work of a London engraver of Flemish parentage, Martin Droeshout. As he was only twenty-two years of age when the First Folio was published, he cannot have known Shakespeare well enough to draw his face from memory. A picture painted in oils on an elm panel, discovered in 1892 by Mr. Edgar Flower in the collection of Mr. H. C. Clements of Peckham Rye, bears evident marks of antiquity—on the top right-hand corner is the inscription "Wilm. Shackspeare 1609"—and many regard this painting as the original from which Droeshout copied his hideous plate. This picture, by the generosity of Mrs. Charles Flower, is now in the Stratford Memorial Theatre. The Chandos Portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, London, is the best known portrait of Shakespeare. Its history, written on the back of the picture, is as follows: "The Chandos Shakespeare was the property of John Taylor the player, by whom, or by Richard Burbage, it was painted. It was left by the former in his will to Sir William Davenant. After his death it was bought by Betterton, the actor, upon whose decease Mr. Keck of the Temple purchased it for forty guineas, from whom it was inherited by Mr. Nicoll of Michenden House, Southgate, Middlesex, whose only daughter married James, Marquis of Caernarvon, afterwards Duke of Chandos, father to Anna Eliza, Duchess of Buckingham." It was bought by the Earl of Ellesmere at the sale of Stowe in 1848, and presented in 1856 to the National Gallery. The authenticity of the picture has been



doubted, but at least it represents a human being, which is more than may be said for the Droeshout. If we wish to think of Shakespeare in the flesh, we cannot do better than think of him as this picture depicts him, or, if this fails to satisfy, as the excellent "imaginary portrait" of Shakespeare by Ford Madox Brown, which now hangs in the Manchester Art Gallery imagines him to have been.

We know so little about Shakespeare's personality that we are wont to think of him as inscrutable, and sphinx-like, standing aloof from life like his creation Prospero; and yet, if the sadly too short testimonies of his friends are to be believed, he was anything but that. They dwell on his wit, his kindness, his geniality and his honesty. "I loved the man," says Ben Jonson in *Timber*, "and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature: had an excellent fantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions." To his contemporaries he was an attractive man. As far as we know he had no enemies.

He was a man of keen observation, intelligent and shrewd, naturally endowed with a love of romantic fiction and a wonderful fluency of happy expression in writing. Ben Jonson tells us, in *Timber*, lxiv, on the authority of the players—and the same assertion is made in other words by Hemming and Condell in their preface to the First Folio—"that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line." He never posed as a scholar or a critic. Once, in *Hamlet*, he ventured to air his opinions upon the purpose of acting and the art of declamation; but knowing how lines should be spoken did not make him a great actor like Burbage or Alleyn. He seems to have been a man of conventional views in religion and politics, ambitious to improve his social standing, to increase his property, and to become a country gentleman. He had his fits of



depression, when he hated the profession of the theatre:

‘Alas! ’tis true I have gone here and there  
And made myself a motley to the view.’

—black moods when he was out of tune with the rhythm of life; but he was temperamentally a man of common sense, who prized as the highest possession of himself and others an unaffected, sensible, understanding nature. His capacity for feeling was enormous, yet he was not hypersensitive and petulant. Perhaps it was to avoid irritation that he chose to live alone for the greater part of his life. His political opinions stood for that internal goodwill in the state which makes government and the arts possible. He disliked demagogue-ridden mobs, and hated sedition. He loved a diplomatic, popular, and successful king. Fortunately he had the inward eye and the sense of humour, which are the saving graces of successful candidates for wealth and fame. As he loathed pomposity, affectation, self-importance, and pedantry in others, so, one imagines, he avoided it in himself. One pictures him in his scarlet suit and a goffered ruff, a melancholy oval face with bald forehead and auburn vandyke beard, a gentle, kindly, humorous soul.

What impresses one above all is the deep understanding of his reflective mind. His knowledge of human life is as deep as it is wide. His style is an inexplicable miracle of sweetness, strength and piquancy. His genius endowed him with an inimitable command of vivid and beautiful imagery, an instinctive feeling for apt word and phrase, and a poetic talent for moulding idea into melody and rhythm which practice only made more facile. Perhaps his greatest endowment, which is often overlooked, was his wonderful eye for scene. His greatest scenes are miracles of poetry and imagination.



tion. He rarely admitted a scene which is offensive, even to our outwardly less coarse age. A comparison of Shakespeare's grossest scenes with those of his contemporaries and successors on the Jacobean stage reveals his delicacy of taste. The same restraint characterizes his treatment of men and women in the pangs of deep emotion or suffering. It is this restraint, this delicacy of feeling which, wedded to his tolerance of men that he disliked, and together with his intense imaginative sympathy, stamp him as the greatest poet and the greatest dramatist who has ever written in English.

As a writer he is not usually obscure, but graphic, dignified and wise. His best remembered lines are either impassioned description, figurative comparison, or those wonderful expressions of human wisdom—thought that all may think, expressed in perfect phrases: "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express't"—reflective wisdom transfigured by the magic of poetic music. He was never morbid. He never anatomized carrion, nor presented an introspection of the obscene. He never expressed, except to chide, the abuse of the malcontent, or the peevish railings of the ignoble and unworthy. He disliked, as do healthy natures, the decadent and unnatural types of humanity. His melancholy even in tragedy is never sustained. The forces of evil in his dramas never triumph completely. They may kill the body: they may not defile the spirit. Even in his villains there is some humanity, some touch of nature, some spark of latent nobility. His dramas are a feast, not merely of intellect, but for head and heart combined. They enlarge our sympathies, enrich our imaginative experience, and increase our consciousness. Perhaps the noblest testimony to his grandeur is that uttered by Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668: "He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most



comprehensive soul. . . . When he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. . . . I cannot say he is everywhere alike. . . . He is many times flat, insipid . . . but he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not raise himself high above the rank of poets:

*Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi."*

#### IV

### THE TEXT, CHRONOLOGY, AND CRITICISM OF THE PLAYS

**N**O authentic manuscript in Shakespeare's handwriting is known. But there are extant six signatures of his. One is on a deposition, dated May 11, 1612, and signed "*Willm. Shaks.*," which Shakespeare made in a suit for the payment of a dowry brought by an old acquaintance of his named Stephen Bellott, against his father-in-law, namely that same Christopher Montjoy or Mountjoy, of Silver Street, in the City of London, with whom Shakespeare had lodged. Shakespeare is described as a gentleman of Stratford-on-Avon, aged forty-eight "or thereabouts." This signature was discovered a few years ago by Professor C. W. Wallace in the Public Record Office. Another is on an indenture, relating to the purchase of a house in Blackfriars by Shakespeare, Hemming and others, dated March 10, 1612/3, now in the Guildhall Library. A third is on a mortgage deed of this property, now in the British Museum, dated March 11, 1612/3. Three more signatures are to be found on his will in Somerset House, dated March 25, 1616, and signed both "Shakspeare" and "Shakspere"; and there is also the doubtful signature of the copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

It has been maintained by Richard Simpson in 1871, a few months later by James Spedding, and more recently by Sir Edward Maunde Thompson,



and others,<sup>1</sup> that three pages in Shakespeare's handwriting are interpolated in the manuscript play *Sir Thomas More* (Harleian MS. 7368, British Museum), which was written probably by Anthony Munday, Dekker and others. The date of the play is unknown. It may, as is alleged, have been written for Lord Strange's Company, of which Shakespeare was a member, some time between 1590 and 1594, or it may have been written later for the Lord Admiral's men. The argument that the scene is Shakespeare's is based not only upon the asserted resemblance of the handwriting of this scene to the scanty fragments of Shakespeare's handwriting in the signatures, but upon considerations of the style and spirit of the 147 lines of the scene, on coincidences of spelling, and the alleged probability that *Sir Thomas More* was written for the company of which Shakespeare was then a member. This is the most considerable Shakespearian "discovery" of recent years, and though the theory cannot definitely be either proved or disproved, it is likely to lead to a reconsideration of the received printed text of Shakespeare in the light of the study of Elizabethan handwriting and common errors of printers and compositors.

Shakespeare's complete plays were first published, "according to the True Originall copies," in 1623. This edition, now commonly known as the "First Folio," was edited seven years after his death by two members of the King's Company, friends of Shakespeare, named John Hemming and Henry Condell. It is dedicated to the brothers William, Earl of Pembroke, and Philip, Earl of Montgomery, and was published in partnership by W. Jaggard, Ed. Blount, I. Smithweeke and W. Aspley. Hemming and Condell edited the volume "without ambition either of self-profit or fame, only to keep the memory of so worthy

<sup>1</sup> See *Shakespeare's Hand in 'Sir Thomas More,'* ed. by A. W. Pollard, Cambridge Press, 1923.



a friend and fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare." It contained sixteen plays which had already been published in quarto form, and twenty which were now published for the first time, including *As You Like It*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

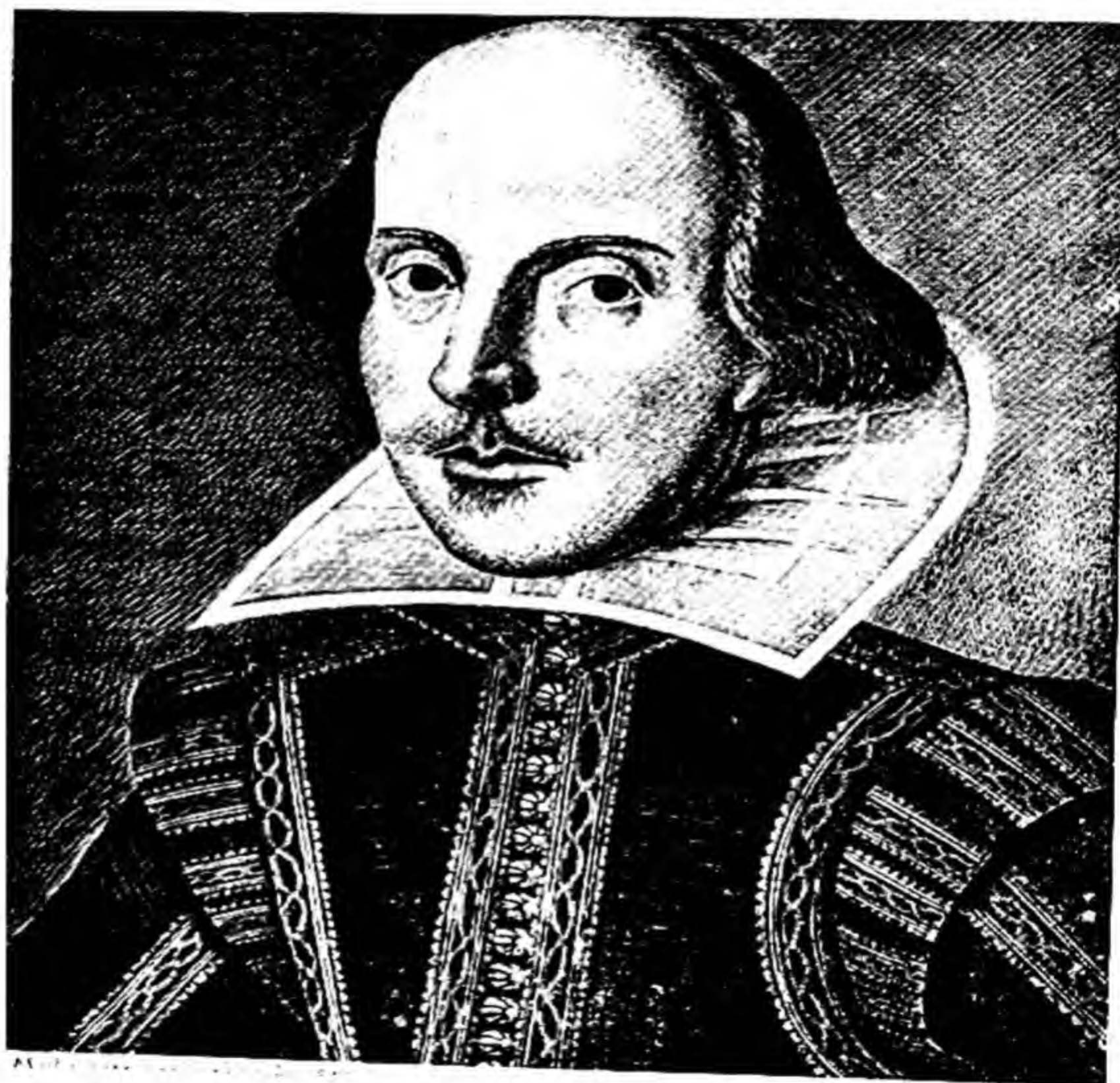
"It had been a thing worthy to have been wished," they said in their preface, "that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings." And obviously some of the plays are not wholly by Shakespeare. Shakespeare's work in the three parts of *Henry VI* may have been collaboration, or more probably revision of earlier plays. We are told by Edward Ravenscroft, who adapted *Titus Andronicus* in 1687 after the Restoration, that *Titus Andronicus* "was brought by a private author to be acted, and he only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters." *Timon of Athens* is probably not wholly by Shakespeare, and *Henry VIII*, it is believed, is largely by Fletcher. But we must assume that Hemming and Condell published the plays of the King's Company which were believed to be Shakespeare's, either because he wrote them, or because he made them his by revision and collaboration. They assembled earlier quartos, manuscripts from the *Globe* and *Blackfriars*, and perhaps, when the original prompt-copy was lost, the separate parts of the actors; and prepared the collection for the press, dividing some of the plays into five acts, others into both acts and scenes—some plays were not divided throughout into acts. They corrected the bad quartos—"stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed or deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed (published) them"—and published the prompt-copies "absolute in their numbers as he conceived them." But the merits of the texts of the plays vary greatly. Some are excellent texts. Others



MR. WILLIAM  
**SHAKESPEARES**

COMEDIES,  
HISTORIES, &  
TRAGEDIES.

Published according to the True Originall Copies.



L O N D O N  
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

Title \_\_\_\_\_

**Author**

Accession No.

Call No.

[illegible]



are incredibly bad, and teem with obvious errors.

The thirty-six plays of the First Folio are the canon of Shakespeare's plays. The only other plays which are regarded as certainly the partial work of Shakespeare are *Pericles*, which, though not admitted to the First Folio, was published thrice in quarto during Shakespeare's life with his name on the title page, but was not included in the canon until the second edition of the Third Folio (1664); and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, published in quarto in 1634, and stated on the title page to be the work of "the admirable worthies of their time, Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. William Shakespeare." The plays appear in the same order in the Folio as they appear in modern editions, beginning with *The Tempest* and ending with *Cymbeline*, first the Comedies, next the Histories, and lastly the Tragedies. *Timon of Athens* appears to have been inserted between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Cæsar* as an afterthought in place of *Troilus and Cressida*, which, since it was not a tragedy in the Shakespearian sense of the word, was removed to its present position between the Histories and the Tragedies. Amongst the latter also was included *Cymbeline*, possibly in order to add to the number of the Tragedies, which otherwise would only have amounted to ten, as against sixteen Comedies.

The dates of composition of the plays with few exceptions are uncertain, and cannot be determined with exactitude. The order of the Folio is not chronological, and many of the plays baffle chronology. Dramas were not always acted as soon as they were written; for example, *Troilus and Cressida* was published in 1609, written earlier, and produced after publication. Shakespeare revised, recast, and even renamed his plays. *Love's Labour's Lost* was revised. *Hamlet* was recast, revised, and enlarged. Possibly *Love's Labour's Won*, mentioned by Meres in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), was revised and renamed.



Even when composition, production, and publication in quarto followed at short intervals, we cannot tell how long Shakespeare was writing the play. As *You Like It* appears to have been written in haste. *Hamlet* may have been on the stocks for years. Moreover, we do not know when Shakespeare began to write plays, though we imagine about 1590; and we are uncertain when he terminated his connection with the stage, though 1613 is probably an outside limit. Hence, the best endeavours of scholars can only provide approximate dates for most of the plays—years when the play was in commission, either in Shakespeare's writing-chamber, or on the boards.

The chronological sequence of Shakespeare's plays, the work of Malone (1790) and the Shakespeare editors of the nineteenth century, was the outcome of belief in progress as a natural improvement that can be observed and estimated. Critics wished to see progress in the hand that characterized *Romeo*, *Hamlet*, and *Prospero*, and they found it. They considered the external and internal evidences of date in the plays—entries in the Stationers' Register, dates of the various quarto editions, contemporary references, allusions in the plays to persons, events, and literary works, and the internal evidence of style, thought, and rhythm—and produced chronological lists which are probably roughly correct, but certainly not absolutely convincing. Nevertheless, their chronology is the result of wide reading, critical skill, and great ingenuity. Determining limits between which the particular play must have been written, are sought for in such evidence as the date of earliest publication, or performance on the stage, references and allusions to other works in the plays, or in other works to the plays. The probable date is then inferred by the evidence of style and metre.

The Registers of the Stationers' Company<sup>1</sup> contain

<sup>1</sup> *Transcript of the Registers of the Stationers' Company, 1554-1640*, edited E. Arber.



entries, often carelessly made and without the author's name, of the titles of the plays published separately as quarto booklets, and of the date of their entry for publication by the printer. These entries are as evidence not so reliable as the actual quartos which, after 1600, usually bore Shakespeare's name. But some quartos were entered a year or two before they were published; others were entered and never published. *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, was not published as a quarto till 1600, but it was entered for publication on July 22, 1598. *Troilus and Cressida* was first published in 1609, but it was evidently written much earlier, for it was entered on February 7, 1602/3. The first quarto of *King Lear* is dated 1608: it was entered on November 26, 1607. There are no extant quartos of *As You Like It*, entered August 4, 1600, or of *Antony and Cleopatra*, which was entered on May 20, 1608.

After entry in the Stationers' Register came as a rule publication in quarto form. Seventeen of Shakespeare's plays were thus published before the collected folio edition of 1623. Many of these were reprinted several times, and two plays—*Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*—appeared in quarto form in two distinct versions. The dates of publication of the first quartos of the seventeen plays are as follows: *Titus Andronicus*, "played by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Derby, Earl of Pembroke, and Earl of Sussex, and the Lord Chamberlain, their servants," 1594; *Richard III*, 1597; *Romeo and Juliet*, Q1, 1597, Q2 "newly corrected, augmented, and amended," 1599; *Richard II*, 1597; *Love's Labour's Lost*, "newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespeare," 1598; 1 *Henry IV*, 1598; *The Merchant of Venice*, 1600; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1600 (the "Roberts" quartos of the two last plays, though dated 1600, were printed in 1619); 2 *Henry IV*, 1600; *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1600; *Henry V*, 1600; *The*



*Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1602; *Hamlet*, Q1, 1603, Q2 "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copy," 1604; *King Lear*, 1608 (this quarto contains Act IV, Scene iii, and other passages which are not in the First Folio); *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609; *Pericles*, 1609; and *Othello*, 1622. Some of these quartos, notably *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Hamlet* (1603), differ from the more perfect texts in the First Folio, and are therefore of great interest. Some of them—*Henry V*, for example—appear to be abridged acting versions of Shakespeare's play; others appear to be the "stolen and surreptitious copies" procured for the printer by the treacherous mediation of some of the "injurious impostors" alluded to by Hemming and Condell in their preface. The rest, fourteen in number, including *Romeo and Juliet* (1599) and *Hamlet* (1604), are good texts which may have been authorized for publication by the players, and printed in some cases from the prompt copy. They are used, together with the folio text, as the basis of modern editions. Indeed, some of the quartos, notably *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, appear to have been employed by Hemming and Condell as the text of the First Folio. The dates of publication of the first quartos prove that the play in question was then, and had probably been for some time, in existence, for it would appear that plays were only published with the consent of the companies who had bought them when they were beginning to lose their vogue upon the stage.<sup>1</sup> Further, the dates on the quartos are not always trustworthy. Thus Dr. W. W. Greg has shown by a close examination and comparison that five reprinted quartos ascribed to earlier dates, viz. *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Mid-*

<sup>1</sup> See A. W. Pollard, *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates*, 1917.



*summer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, and *King Lear* were really published in 1619 with a forged date and publisher's name. So that the dates of the quartos form a valuable, but not an absolutely reliable, guide to chronology.

Contemporary references to Shakespeare's plays are sadly too rare. The most important is the list of plays given by Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia*, 1598, which has already been cited in Chapter III. He mentions six comedies and six tragedies. Probably the balanced effect is intentional, and the list may not include all Shakespeare's plays written before 1598. There is no mention, for example, of any of the three parts of *Henry VI*. Nevertheless, it fixes definitely amongst Shakespeare's earliest plays the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice* in comedy; *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, and *King John* of the English historical plays; and in tragedy *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The comedy *Love's Labour's Won*, mentioned by Meres, is either lost, or, what is more likely, was an alternative title of *The Taming of the Shrew*. The diaries of John Manningham, a barrister of the Middle Temple, and Simon Forman, a quack doctor and astrologist, contribute valuable information. The former witnessed a performance of *Twelfth Night*, then a new play, in the Middle Temple Hall, and described it in his diary on February 2, 1601/2. The latter recorded performances of *Macbeth* at the Globe, on April 20, 1610, and of *A Winter's Tale* on May 15, 1611, when he also outlines the plot of *Cymbeline*, which was evidently acted about the same time. The accounts of the Master of the Revels<sup>1</sup> specify payments for performances of *Othello*, *The Merry Wives*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy*

<sup>1</sup> See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. V, Appendix B.



of *Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry V*, *The Merchant of Venice* (twice) in the winter of 1604-5, and again of *The Tempest* and *A Winter's Tale* in the autumn of 1611. The accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber<sup>1</sup> indicate that at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine in February 1612/3, fourteen plays were acted by the King's Company, of which five—possibly six—were Shakespeare's. Other allusions have been found in poems such as John Weever's *Mirror of Martyrs*, 1601, written in 1599, which refers to the speeches of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Cæsar*, and thus dates the play as early as 1599; and in letters, such as Sir Henry Wotton's letter to his nephew, dated July 6, 1613, cited in *Reliquiæ Wottonianæ*, which tells of the performance of *Henry VIII* at the *Globe*, and the destruction of the theatre by fire at the end of June 1613.

Allusions in the plays of Shakespeare to recent events and to contemporary literature may help to fix their date, but the difficulty of this slippery evidence is that it is not always clear whether the allusion stood originally in the first draft of the play, or whether it was an after-thought inserted in revision, like the allusion to Moll Frith (I, iii, 135) in *Twelfth Night*. Some allusions are clear enough, however. The *Comedy of Errors* (III, ii, 125) contains a punning reference to France "making war against her heir," which can only refer to the civil war, during which, in 1591, Henri of Navarre was assisted by 4,000 English soldier-adventurers under the leadership of the Earl of Essex. There would have been no point in making this allusion after the coronation of Henri IV in February 1594, and the indication is that the *Comedy of Errors* was being acted in 1591. Another allusion to Essex is to be seen in the Chorus to Act V of *Henry V*:

<sup>1</sup> E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, Appendix B.



" Were now the general of our gracious empress,  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing Rebellion broached on his sword,  
How many would the peaceful city quit  
To welcome him ! "

The hint of the speedy return of Essex indicates that *Henry V* was being performed during the summer of 1599. Essex left London on March 27, and returned at the end of September 1599; probably the play was acted in June and July. That *As You Like It* was being acted whilst Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* was still popular, is apparent from the allusion, put into the mouth of Phebe in Act III, Scene v :

" Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might :  
' Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight ? ' "

The " dead shepherd " was Christopher Marlowe, killed in a brawl in 1593, and the " saw " is quoted from his *Hero and Leander* published in 1598. One might cite many more, particularly if one included uncertain and doubtful allusions, but one shall suffice. The names of the fiends ejaculated by Edgar in *King Lear* (IV, i, 60)—Obidicut, Hobbididance, Mahu, Modo, Flibbertigibbet—were borrowed from Harsnet's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, 1603. Hence *King Lear* was written after 1603.

The evidence of style is impalpable and more difficult to appreciate, but it is nevertheless unmistakable. Study and comparison of the plays forces upon us the reasonable conclusion that the plays of Shakespeare, like the novels of Dickens and Hardy, record an individual growth and development of imaginative and intellectual genius. As one would expect, there are " sports." Whenever *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may have been written, Shakespeare never transcended the poetry of fairyland with which he adorned an otherwise not great play. If we were not certain from other evidence



that *Cymbeline* was produced late in his career, we should find it hard of belief that, after writing dramas as fine structurally as *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*, Shakespeare stooped to that well-intentioned failure of construction. But, taken as a whole, the plays exhibit a gradual progress in comprehension and self-criticism.

The persons of Shakespeare's earliest plays are characterized merely for the part they are destined to play as lovers, princes, fools or rogues. He often economized characterization by duplicating or even triplicating important figures like the two Antipholuses and the two Dromios in the *Comedy of Errors*, or the two pairs of lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or, for example, the three courtiers of the King of Navarre and the three ladies attending the Princess of France in *Love's Labour's Lost*. In the earliest plays the dramatic development of the initial situation is of greater moment than characterization. The action is varied, and complicating incidents follow in quick succession. The language of these plays is full of imaginative fire and fancy, and of the wit of pun and retort. But as he became master of his art, his genius for making personality vital and convincing developed. He created fictive characters like Falstaff, Rosalind, Viola, Brutus, Hamlet, Iago, Lady Macbeth, King Lear—figures who are, it is true, the imaginative product of their particular circumstances, but of such stupendous vitality that the interest of the situation is almost overwhelmed by the interest of character and living charm. The development of the initial situation by dramatic complication is no longer so mechanical. It depends on, and is often governed by, a dominant or ruling figure like Portia, Rosalind, Iago, the spirit of Cæsar, or the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. His fictional imagination rose from the rich pathos and humour of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer*



*Night's Dream* to the energy of imagination and feeling apparent in *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Tempest*. His sympathy with human passion ripened with advancing age. His humour passed from jollity and wit to the grimness of the magnificent comic scenes in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and the satire of malcontents like Hamlet, Iago, Edmund, and Coriolanus.

In the early comedies, the introduction of a fool or a clown was a concession which Shakespeare regularly paid to an expectant audience. It was a tradition with which he did not care to break until the production of *Macbeth*. The groundlings asked for clowning, and he gave them Launcelot Gobbo, Bully Bottom, Touchstone, and the clown in *Twelfth Night*; but they are opportunities for low comedy and additional scenes rather than dramatic figures. In Shakespeare's last comedies, his comic figures provide farcical scenes which are an integral part of the play—the gulling of Cloten, for example, in *Cymbeline*, the exchange of garments by Florizel and Autolycus in *A Winter's Tale*, or the conspiracy of Stephano and Trinculo in *The Tempest*. These later clownish persons play a definite part in the action, and their individuality is limned with a sure hand.

✓ In the later plays Shakespeare had learned, moreover, to express suffering and rage without rant and bluster, by the native force of their appeal to human sympathies. He had learned by self-criticism that the wit of pun, allusion, and repartee is not always so engaging nor so brilliant in effect as the more realistic and lifelike dialect of native humour. As he grew older and more experienced, too, his moralizing and his reflections upon the value and meaning of life became deeper and more thoughtful. His conception of virtue in man and woman became as noble as his ripe wisdom.

✓ Parallel with his mellowing intellect is apparent



also a development of expression. The thought of the early plays is full of ornament and facile amplification. Meaning is oft embedded in a cataract of words. Reference to almost any speech in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *Romeo and Juliet* will exemplify this excess of rhetorical fluency. In plays of the middle period of his dramatic art—*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry V*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Hamlet*—the relation of thought to economy of expression is well-nigh perfect. Shakespeare then wrote with splendid reticence and more nervous force. But as he grew older, and perhaps careless or easily wearied, he became more reflective and less fluent. He wrote fewer plays, often only one a year against the two or even three of his early manhood. Probably he composed slowly and with difficulty, for it would seem that in his later plays his ease of writing was lost. The magnitude of his sympathies and imaginative passion could scarcely find lucid and comprehensible expression in language. Reference to speeches in *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, or *Coriolanus* will indicate to the reader Shakespeare's tortuous effort to convey his conception. Often he wrote in gusts, staccato. The poetry is intense and often splendid, but the full meaning hovers behind the written word, and is often difficult to grasp. In the speeches of his characters he no longer pursued a metaphor to the extent of its similitude, but danced swiftly from image to image, broke off abruptly, and began a new mode of thought. Shakespeare never lost his love for a play upon words, but he ceased to use puns to the same extent as in the earliest plays; and that habit of borrowing commonplace Latin tags, and scraps of quotation, which was a characteristic of some of the earlier plays, gradually died after he attained full intellectual stature.



His versification changed, too. The early plays abound in riming lines ; for example, *Love's Labour's Lost* has more than 1,000 ; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 730 ; *Richard II*, 530 ; *Romeo and Juliet*, 480 ; and *The Comedy of Errors*, though a short play, 380. But the plays of the middle period range from only 34 riming lines in *Julius Cæsar* to 120 in *Twelfth Night* ; and in the latest plays there is either little or no rime. *The Tempest* has only two rimed lines, *A Winter's Tale* none. One cannot definitely draw any conclusion as to chronology from this, save it would appear that at first Shakespeare regarded rime as a poetic grace in drama and used it as an adornment ; but later he realized the dramatic superiority of blank verse, and avoided rime, except in the concluding couplet which marked the end of scenes. Most wonderful of all is the gradual change which came over the rhythm of his blank verse. Comparison of early, middle, and later plays forces upon one the conclusion that Shakespeare commenced by taking regular verse of five rising feet as his model, and that, in course of time, as its rigid alternating accents failed to please his ear, he varied it more and more until finally it became something which is still poetry, but scarcely regular verse. In a later chapter we shall examine the principles of Shakespearian versification, but as these variations from the normal have a bearing on the chronology of the plays, it will be necessary to mention some of them here.

We may regard the regular pattern of Elizabethan blank verse as five successive feet, each composed of an unaccented followed by an accented syllable, with half-pause or "cæsure" after the second foot :

. — . — || . — . — . —

To vary the monotony of this pattern, Shakespeare used certain notable variations, which have been

counted, tabulated, and used as statistics. Though it is more than doubtful that the methods of the dismal science apply also to poetry, these results are so striking and have played so great a part in determining the accepted chronology of the plays that they cannot be neglected entirely. By some strange freak of nature it does appear that the Jacobean change of fashion from regular to free verse coincided with Shakespeare's career as a dramatist, and that he alone amongst the poets may admissibly be made the sport of the statistician. The so-called "verse tests," begun by Mr. F. G. Fleay, developed in England by members of the New Shakespeare Society and in Germany by Dr. Goswin König, the author of *Der Vers in Shakspeare's Dramen*, consist of the enumeration of certain particular variations of blank verse, and the tabulated record of the percentage of these variations to the total number of lines in each play. Only three of them appear to bear an obvious significance, and therefore only these three will be mentioned.

The first is the "feminine ending"<sup>1</sup>—the addition of an unaccented syllable after the fifth foot—which was steadily gaining favour with the dramatic poets during Shakespeare's career, the pattern of which is :

. — . — . — . — . — .

Tabulation of the number of "feminine endings" in the plays reveals the fact that the percentage of such lines is less than 20 per cent. in the early plays, remains between 20 per cent. and 30 per cent. in Shakespeare's finest comedies and great tragedies, and rises in *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* to something over 30 per cent. The cadence of the verse of eleven syllables evidently grew upon

<sup>1</sup> "Feminine" because the term originally arose in French verse where the final e, as in *âme*, *flamme*, *heure*, *peine*, is often an indication of feminine gender.



Shakespeare, as upon his contemporaries. The work of Fletcher especially is characterized by this type of verse. In *Henry VIII*, in which Fletcher is supposed to have collaborated with Shakespeare, the percentage of feminine endings is as high as 47.3.

The earliest Elizabethan blank verse was written in successive lines, each of which was a complete sentence or phrase, so arranged that, besides the half pause somewhere in the middle of the line, there was a full pause at the end of each, as in the following verses from *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV, iii, 350) :

" From women's eyes this doctrine I derive :  
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire ;  
They are the books, the arts, the academes,  
That show, contain, and nourish all the world ;  
Else none at all in aught proves excellent."

But in Shakespeare's time dramatists were beginning to realize that the effect of the invariable use of the "end-stopt" type of blank verse is humdrum unless there are internal variations within the line, such as suspended and inverted accent, or diversification of the position of the cæsure. Therefore to break the monotony of regularity, and to produce a line which combined the dignity of verse with something of the free rhythm of speech, Shakespeare tended more and more as he versified to terminate a period, not at the end, but within the line ; and to carry forward the complementary phrase to the following verse, as in the following passage from *Measure for Measure* (III, i, 115) :

" Ay, but to die, and go we know not where ;  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot ;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod ; and the delightful spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about

The pendant world: 'tis too horrible!  
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life,  
 That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
 Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
 To what we fear of death."

Such "run-on" lines occur even in the earliest plays to the amount of 10 per cent. to 20 per cent., but they become increasingly frequent, the number rising in the plays of the middle period to about 20 per cent., and even more sharply in the later plays from 20 per cent. in *Othello* to 45 per cent. in *Coriolanus*, until in the last plays the percentage is always 40 per cent. or more. The increasing frequency, however, is not regularly consistent, and from such data no certain conclusions as to date of composition may be made.

Another remarkable stylistic change remains to be mentioned. In the early plays Shakespeare usually began and ended sticks of dialogue at the beginning and end of a verse, but as he developed his technique he tended more and more to begin and end dialogue in the midst of a verse. The number of such medial "speech endings" has been counted for the plays and their percentages tabulated, and the figures appear to indicate a gradual, but by no means regular, rise from 1 per cent. in *Love's Labour's Lost* to 87.6 per cent. in *A Winter's Tale*. What was at first an irregularity became the normal.

But however strong the temptation to rely on such statistics, one must deny the absolute validity of numerical evidence in the world of poetry. These changes in versification are not scientific data, but rather tendencies and fashions made unconsciously and inconsistently. The habits of poets are not conformable to mathematical law. It would be possible from such evidence as this to "discover" the very month of composition, and, absurd as it seems, the thing has been done; but such Babylonian calculations are one of the follies of scientific method. They



make no allowance for human inconsistency and poetic caprice, and they overlook the varying influence of the verse of Shakespeare's contemporaries. They disregard revision, the *limæ labor*, and the chief fact of authorship, which is that art is long, and a play is not conceived, written, and perfected at a bound.<sup>1</sup>

The result of these chronological inquiries is to place the order of composition roughly as follows on page 66. It will be noticed that the plays fall naturally into four groups. Firstly, an early period of experiment in various forms: Shakespeare was attracted by the dramatization of history, and the two fine tragedies *Richard II* and *Richard III* were early plays; he essayed several types of comedy, and made two romantic tragedies, *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Secondly, the period in which, even in the historical plays, the comic spirit prevails. Thirdly, a period of tragedy and cynical tragi-comedy; and, lastly, a more serene period of romantic tragi-comedy to which *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* belong.

The "Second Folio" of 1632, issued by Thomas Cotes, was a reprint of the First with many new misprints, and a few emendations which have been accepted by later editors. The "Third Folio," published in 1663 by Peter Chetwynde, was in its original form a reprint of the Second; but a second edition was issued in 1664 which contained seven additional plays attributed to Shakespeare:—*Pericles*,

<sup>1</sup> After this had been written, I found confirmation in Dr. E. K. Chambers's able pamphlet *The Disintegration of Shakespeare*, Milford, 1924. Not only does Dr. Chambers impugn the accuracy of the statistics, but he challenges their validity. "They can only indicate a trend of development, and the trend may be diverted in any play by accidents of subject matter, such as refractory personal names which have to be coerced into the metre; by the appropriateness of particular rhythms to scenes of particular temper; above all, by Shakespeare's experimentalism, which certainly extends to rhythm."





*The London Prodigal*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Puritan Widow*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *Lochrine*. Of these none, except possibly *Pericles*, is accepted as the work of Shakespeare. Another play attributed to Shakespeare after his death was *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, published in quarto in 1634 by "the admirable worthies of their time, Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. William Shakespeare." It is very possible that Shakespeare did collaborate in this play with Fletcher, which was written about the same time as *Henry VIII*.

The verses of Ben Jonson, "To the Memory of Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us," prefixed to the First Folio, and those of John Milton, "An Epitaph on the admirable Dramatic poet, W. Shakespeare," prefixed to the Second Folio, are an indication of the regard which cultured minds had for Shakespeare in the early part of the seventeenth century. But after the closing of the public theatres during the Civil War, a new fashion in drama arose with the Restoration in 1660. The exiled court had developed a taste for French modes and standards of art. The French drama was marked by adherence to the revived classical form and style of the Italian Renaissance, by its respect for dignity and good manners, by its rhetorical eloquence, and by its conformity to the "rules" of unity of action, place, and time, and of the undivided act. None denied the genius of Shakespeare, but he now appeared rather crude and uncultivated. It was believed that he knew the "rules," but that he broke the classical mode of dramatic structure to satisfy a barbaric audience. "The old plays began to disgust this refined age," says John Evelyn in his *Diary*, speaking of *Hamlet* on November 26, 1661, and Mr. Pepys's dramatic comments substantiate the statement. It became necessary to adapt Shakespeare's plays for the Restoration stage. Davenant and



Dryden improved *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1667) by providing a manly counterpart to Miranda's ignorance of the opposite sex, and by furnishing Caliban with a sister. Dryden imitated *Antony and Cleopatra* as *All for Love, or The World Well Lost* (1678), and in its own style it is a fine play. He was not nearly so successful in his improvement of *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late* (1679). Nahum Tate gave *King Lear* a happy ending. Matthew Locke wrote music for *Macbeth*, and the play became a musical attraction. And later Colley Cibber adapted *Richard III*, adding lines—such as "Now, by St. Paul, the work goes bravely on," and "Richard is himself again"—which persisted in stage versions of the play until the nineteenth century.

In the early years of the Restoration the first literary critic of Shakespeare emerged. John Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) compared the drama of Shakespeare's period with contemporary French drama, and discussed the advisability of using rime instead of blank verse. Neander, as Dryden calls himself, declares that French drama is superior to Elizabethan in structure—their plots are a unity, and every scene in the play is a contribution to the plot—but it is seriously a question whether the French have not lost more than they have gained by their obedience to formal rules. For on the one hand there are English plays which are as "regular" as any of theirs, and have at the same time greater variety of action and character; and on the other hand in the "irregular" plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit than in any of the French plays. Dryden's vote was however given against blank verse in favour of the heroic couplet. In the preface to his *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) he finds that Shakespeare is defective in his plots, but he commends his "universal mind, which comprehended



all characters and passions." Dryden was not always consistent, and his deference to the theoretical canons of Aristotle and Horace unfitted him to be an unprejudiced critic of the Elizabethan dramatists, but he uttered much sincerely and finely expressed praise of Shakespeare's genius in his essays and also in his prologues; and the famous passage in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, quoted on page 47, is one of the most judicious and yet enthusiastic appreciations of Shakespeare ever penned.

The eighteenth century critics complained that Shakespeare "wanted art," as Jonson had said to Drummond, and lacked learning. He lived under a mere light of nature, said Nicholas Rowe in his preface to the Plays of Shakespeare. His studies were most demonstratively confined to nature and his own language, said Dr. Farmer in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767). But Shakespeare's plays were again popular on the stage and in the study, and it was soon apparent that Shakespeare could neither be enjoyed nor appreciated according to the classical standards of dramatic taste. Lecturing at Edinburgh about 1770, Dr. Blair said: "There is hardly any one of his Plays which can be called altogether a good one, or which can be read with uninterrupted pleasure from beginning to end. Besides extreme irregularities in conduct (structure), and grotesque mixtures of serious and comic in one piece, we are often interrupted by unnatural thoughts, harsh expressions, a certain obscure bombast, and a play upon words. . . . All these faults, however, Shakespeare redeems by two of the greatest excellences which any Tragic Poet can possess:—his lively and diversified paintings of character; his strong and natural expressions of passion. These are his two chief virtues; on these his merit rests." Alexander Pope, the poet, spoke more justly when, in his edition of Shakespeare (1725), he said that to



judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules is like judging the inhabitant of one country by the laws of another. Dr. Johnson frankly abandoned the futile attempt to reconcile Shakespeare with academic requirements. He declared in his edition of Shakespeare (1765) that in spite of faulty plots, anachronisms, blemishes of style, and the absence of poetic justice, Shakespeare's plays are the offspring of observation and genius, and genius is above all rules. Shakespeare moves his readers, and that is enough. And in confirmation of this liberal attitude Maurice Morgann, in his *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), declared that Poetry is magic, and magicians have no laws. Henceforth in England Shakespeare's sun rose again clear and undimmed above the horizontal misty air, no longer "shorn of its beams."

The first critical edition of Shakespeare's plays was edited by Nicholas Rowe in 1709. Rowe wrote the first life of Shakespeare, based upon tradition and such facts as were available. He established the traditional division into acts and scenes, fixed the localities of the scenes, and amplified stage directions. He attempted emendations of the more obvious errors of the Fourth Folio, published in 1685, on which he based his text. It was unfortunate that the textual study of Shakespeare, to which many scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries devoted such critical discernment and enthusiasm, was based upon a third-hand reprint. Had Rowe made the First Folio the basis of his text, much subsequent labour in vain would have been spared. Rowe was followed by Alexander Pope, who edited Shakespeare in seven quarto volumes (1723-5). Pope's ideal was "correctness," and in the spirit of Augustan poetry he took many fine liberties with the transmitted text which were ingenious, but certainly not restorations of Shakespeare's original



expressions. Lewis Theobald, to satirize whom Pope wrote the *Dunciad*, was the first editor to employ the right method of textual criticism. His edition appeared eight years after Pope's, in 1733. He was the first to recognize the validity of the quarto editions, many of which he carefully collated. His emendations, though sometimes unnecessary and unconvincing, are often brilliant. It is to Theobald that we owe such brilliant strokes as "Here feel we *but* the penalty of Adam" (*As You Like It*, II, i, 5), "Two of the first, *like coats in heraldry*" (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, III, ii, 213), and the famous passage, "His nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a *babled* of green fields" (*Henry V*, II, iii, 16). Theobald was followed by Sir Thomas Hanmer (1744), Dr. Warburton (1747), Dr. Johnson (1765), Edward Capell (1768), Dr. Johnson and George Steevens (1773). Capell was the first editor to base his text upon a complete collation and comparison of the quartos and folios. Steevens first attempted to reprint the quartos. He published *Twenty of the Plays of Shakespeare* in 1766, and in *Six Old Plays* (1779) he republished the originals of six of Shakespeare's revisions. Edmund Malone, the most learned of all the eighteenth century editors of Shakespeare, published his edition in 1790. His *Prolegomena to Shakespeare* is still a valuable monument of scholarship.

A new turn to Shakespearian criticism was given by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). The prose writings of Coleridge are often discursive and sometimes tedious, but he had one great advantage over all earlier critics of Shakespeare, a sensibility to the imagination of Shakespeare and an understanding of its intentions and workings by intellectual sympathy and poetic instinct. His *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare* were neither published nor revised for press by him; but even in their imperfect form,



amongst much unprofitable verbosity and a good deal of error in fact, they enunciate a new critical attitude to Shakespeare, and bear on almost every page the marks of the most admirable taste and appreciation. His method was intuitive rather than judicial. He looked at the poetry of Shakespeare's scenes from within, reconstructing the poet's motives in the light of his achievement. His philosophical mind delighted in distinctions, such as for example the comparison between Othello and Leontes, from which he concluded that whilst Leontes is a jealous man, Othello is a credulous lover. He attacked and overthrew the Augustan opinion that Shakespeare was an irregular genius, the poet of nature rather than of art. He branded this notion, which had been subscribed to by Dryden, Rowe, Farmer and Blair, as an error arising from a narrow and exclusively literary education. It was not, he said in effect, that Shakespeare succeeded in spite of neglecting the rules of formal classical drama, but rather that Shakespeare created his own rules and dramatized in obedience to them. Here he showed the way to later critics, who have endeavoured to fathom the mind and technique of Shakespeare. He dispelled the academic view, put in a nutshell by Voltaire in the preface to his tragedy *Irène*, that Shakespeare is a barbarian with sparks of genius,<sup>1</sup> and enunciated by Professor Blair at Edinburgh in the words: "It is a genius shooting wild; deficient in just taste, and altogether unassisted by knowledge or art." Coleridge claimed with persuasion that Shakespeare was not merely a poet of deep feeling and high imagination, but "a most profound, energetic and philosophical mind." Coleridge's intuitive critical power is well exemplified in his note on the order of

<sup>1</sup> In his *Dissertation on Tragedy* Voltaire said of *Hamlet*: "One would think this work the fruit of the imagination of a barbarous drunkard."



Shakespeare's plays, which arranges the plays in a chronological order not very remote from the more recent and more scientific chronology based on reasonable evidence. How much Coleridge was indebted to A. W. von Schlegel's lectures, *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (1808), is still a disputed problem.

The influence of Coleridge upon Shakespearian criticism led to the psychological studies of Professor Edward Dowden, *Shakespeare, his Mind and Art* (1874), and Professor A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), and *Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (1909). But it is doubtful whether his influence upon the textual critics has been so valuable. It is obvious that it is one thing to recapture the intention and spirit of Shakespeare's poetry, and quite another to accept or emend the text. In textual matters intuition is not a safe guide. But scholarly and valuable editions are J. O. Halliwell's *Shakespeare* (1853-65), Dyce's (1857), The Globe Edition (1864), The Eversley Edition (1899-1903), and the Arden Shakespeare (1900-23). The Cambridge Shakespeare, begun by Clark and Glover (1863), reprinted by W. Aldis Wright (1891), contains a text based upon careful collation of early and later editions, together with a complete textual critical apparatus. The New Variorum Edition, begun by H. Howard Furness (1871), and continued by his nephew of the same name, is still in progress. Its introduction and notes give the critical essays and annotations of the early editors of Shakespeare, together with new editorial comment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The modern efforts in higher criticism of Frederick Gard Fleay, *The Life and Works of Shakespeare* (1886), Mr. J. M. Robertson's studies on various plays of Shakespeare, and Mr. Dover Wilson's new Cambridge edition of Shakespeare, so ably criticized by Dr. E. K. Chambers in his lecture before the British Academy in 1924 entitled "The Disintegration of Shakespeare," I leave to the cool judgment of time.

# V

## THE POEMS

WE think of Shakespeare to-day as a playwright. We are apt to forget that he was a poet before he was a dramatist, and esteemed by his contemporaries, if the criticisms of Francis Meres, Richard Barnfield, and John Weever are credible, as well if not more highly for *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and the *Sonnets*, as for *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard II*. He pleased the judicious among the Elizabethans by his imagery and his sweetness; and by his melody and his word-magic first held their attention in his early plays.

*Venus and Adonis*, and *Lucrece*, the one based on a classical myth, the other on a Roman legend, are unparalleled, save by Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander*, between Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Keats's *Lamia*. *Venus and Adonis* was published in 1593, by Richard Field, but it may have been written earlier. Shakespeare calls it in the dedication to his patron, the third Earl of Southampton, "the first heir of my invention." It retells in Shakespeare's own way the story of Venus and Adonis, as he had learned it from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book X. Its theme, one which probably appealed to his personal experience, is the temptation of chastity by lust. Much of the poem is occupied, in the style of the mediæval debate, with argument, and there is something elementary in the conduct of the story. But there is delightful musical sweet-



ness in every stanza, which at times gives the poem such lyrical tone as is the spice of rich narrative. The poem appeals chiefly for this, and for its delightful descriptions and images of birds and beasts. Its music, and its descriptive imagery are more worthy of study than its frank delight in concupiscence and the physical charm of sexual passion. The metre is a stanza of six lines composed of five rising feet, riming a b a b c c. It has been used by Spenser in the first eclogue of *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579), and in *The Tears of the Muses* (1591); and by Lodge in *Glaucus and Scylla* (1589). Such an alternately rimed quatrain followed by a couplet is common as a lyrical stanza in later English poetry, but with verses of four feet. In retaining the five feet of heroic verse, Shakespeare made the stanza suitable for narrative, whilst he kept something of its lyrical nature.

*Lucrece*, published in 1594, and also dedicated to Southampton, is written in Chaucer's *Rime Royal* stanza of seven verses of five rising feet, riming a b a b b c c. *Lucrece* is a pictorial narrative poem, descriptive of the beauty of the virtue of Lucretia, the wife of Collatinus, when assailed by Tarquinius, the last of the legendary kings of Rome. It is a "legend" comparable to Chaucer's story of Lucrece in his *Legend of Good Women*. Shakespeare retold it probably from Livy's *Roman History*, Book I, Ch. 57-8, or from the translation in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566). He begins the poem *in mediis rebus* with Tarquin's second visit to Lucrece, and expands the narrative with psychological detail of the thoughts of Tarquin and Lucrece, and pictorial description of the piece—

"Of skilful painting, made from Priam's Troy,"  
representing the Trojan War. *Lucrece* is a more serious poem than *Venus and Adonis*. Shakespeare selected a better story as his subject, and his style



rose to the occasion. The action is swift, and terror is sustained throughout the poem. The pathos of the legend, the distress of Lucrece, is emphasized almost to the exclusion of its political consequences. It was a story which symbolized two themes that lay near to Shakespeare's heart—the defilement of unlawful passion, and the crime of treachery. Throughout his career as a dramatist he constantly reverted to these themes. Here for the first time he embodied them in vivid and musical verse, full of felicity of word and phrase, and of imaginative power, rich both in natural description and in the figurative use of language. Both the *Venus* and the *Lucrece* met with immediate popularity, and were often reprinted.

The *Sonnets* were published by a London bookseller, named Thomas Thorpe, in 1609. It is unlikely that Shakespeare himself caused them to be collected and published. They appear to have been circulated in manuscript. Francis Meres, writing in 1598, speaks of his "sugared sonnets among his private friends." They appear to have been occasional verses written at intervals over a long period of at least ten years. A line from Sonnet 94:

"Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,"

occurs in the anonymous historical play *Edward III* (entered 1595). Two sonnets, Nos. 138 and 144, were printed with other fragments of his in an anthology called *The Passionate Pilgrim*, which was falsely attributed to Shakespeare by the publisher, William Jaggard, in 1599. One, No. 107, if as has been suggested it refers to Southampton's release from imprisonment, was written in 1603. The dedication "To the onlie begetter of these insuing Sonnets, Mr. W. H.," indicates that the publisher, "the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth," as he describes himself, had obtained the manuscript collection



either from one of the persons to whom the sonnets were written, or from some intermediary.

The *Sonnets* fall into two groups: Nos. 1-126 are addressed to a younger man; Nos. 127-154 are addressed to a fickle mistress of dark complexion.

"Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still;  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride."

Is it fiction, like *Venus and Adonis*, or are the sonnets the key to the grand passion of Shakespeare's life? There is no definite answer. Such fiction, bearing truth of emotion rather than corresponding to facts, was well within Shakespeare's powers. On the other hand, many of the sonnets appear to express a sincerity such as only personal experience could inspire. "Mr. W. H." has been sought for in Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, in William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke, in William Hall, presumably Thorpe's friend who procured the manuscript, and in minor gentlemen of the age named William; for the name is vouched for by Sonnets 135 and 143, which pun upon the name of the friend and the wish of the dark lady. Yet it is impossible to identify the owner of the name with certainty, and the faithless mistress is equally unknown to fame or notoriety. Mistress Mary Fitton, for illicit love of whom Pembroke suffered the extreme displeasure of Queen Elizabeth, whose maid of honour she was, was fair in complexion; and the attempt of some investigators to identify her with the dark lady of the sonnets has failed. Nevertheless, Pembroke's age fits the youthfulness which Shakespeare attributed to his friend better than Southampton's. In 1598 he was



eighteen, whereas Southampton was twenty-five; and it is worth noting that the First Folio was dedicated to William, Earl of Pembroke, and his brother by John Hemming and Henry Condell.

The problem of fact and fiction is further complicated by the order of the sonnets, and by the fact that in each major group are impersonal sonnets, soliloquies of Shakespeare on such abstract themes as Time, Death, Lust, and Repentance, which are not especially connected with those sonnets that are obviously addressed to either of the persons of the sequence. The order in which the sonnets were published is possibly Shakespeare's order, but of that there is no proof. It may be an artificial arrangement made either by the person who supplied the manuscript, or by Thomas Thorpe, the publisher. It may be that "the sugared sonnets among his private friends" were addressed to three or four friends or patrons, as well as to the mistress. But if friendship with one man is indicated, the *Sonnets* reveal an affection for a younger man whom Shakespeare urges to marry. During Shakespeare's absence, he steals the love of Shakespeare's mistress, who is uncommonly beautiful, but false. This estrangement is further complicated by the friend's patronage of a rival poet. The sonnets to the dark lady praise her beauty and condemn her fickleness. Further, Shakespeare's melancholy is expressed in regrets for the transience of beauty, in laments for the defacing hand of time, and in weariness of life's ironies and injustices. He appears in the sonnets as a loving, sensitive, outraged soul. If a corrective to that view of Shakespeare were needed, which regards him as a successful playwright and business man, it is to be found here in the *Sonnets*. Whether the seeming story is true or not, Shakespeare unlocks his heart. No portion of his works is so self-revealing.



There is little borrowing or imitation in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. His style is his own, but some of his ideas are part of the common stock of love poetry in the Petrarchan tradition, for example the poet's claim to confer immortality (19, 55), the war of eye and heart (46), the identification of the poet and his lover (62), the rose as a symbol of ideal beauty (109). And if there is conventional symbolism, may we not argue that there are also conventional situations? Indeed, the situations which form the inspirations for groups of sonnets—the advice to marry, the poet's absence, the rival poet, the estrangement—are not so startlingly original or so definite as to bear the stamp of actuality. They are authenticated by no external evidence, neither by the known facts of Shakespeare's life, nor by those of his contemporaries. It is indeed strange, if the *Sonnets* are the expression of a real experience, that no allusion to it in Elizabethan literature remains (save an allusion to "an old player, W. S.," in *Willobie, His Avis* (1594) which is very doubtful). They were written in a decade when sonneteering was fashionable. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) made the sonnet sequence a "testament of love." Coloured by the conceits of Ronsard and Desportes more than by the direct influence of Petrarch, they created a brief tradition in England during the reign of which the sonnet was either a conventional love poem to a mistress, or a philosophical reflection on such personified abstractions as Death, Time, Sorrow, Sleep, and Beauty. The sonnet became a poetic form in which to express lyrical motives which were not lyrical enough for song or ode.

Now Shakespeare's *Sonnets* have exactly this artificiality of image and idea, but whereas some foundation in personal experience can be found for the sonnets of Sidney and Spenser, none can be found, but only invented, for Shakespeare's. It



seems most probable, after weighing both sides of the argument, that Shakespeare's sonnets are a feigned expression of personal feeling, and not autobiography; as for example in modern times is Mr. A. E. Housman's chain of lyrics entitled *A Shropshire Lad*. We need not assume that Shakespeare's happiness was wrecked by a dark beauty. Denunciation of a false mistress with a dark complexion was a conventional theme of sonnet writing. The black complexion was a symbol of a false heart. If Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are fiction, they are none the worse for that. We do not admire *A Shropshire Lad* less because it is not fact. Poetry is not concerned with particular, but with general truth. The truth of fiction is fidelity to human emotion, not to actual situation and incident. The poet's endowment is not historical accuracy, but general knowledge of human nature and especially of the feelings and passions, and ability to express it adequately. The question is not are the *Sonnets* historically true, but rather do they express truth of feeling? Do they reveal the emotions and reflections of a noble mind? Is their style fine and forceful, dignified and musical?

They are unequal in quality, like nearly all Shakespeare's work. He was often careless in execution and impatient of revision, but we may say that, taking them as a whole, they are better sonnets than any previously written in English. Not only did he extend the bounds of the sonnet sequence from the anatomy of love between man and woman to the consideration of friendship and estrangement, love and unfaithfulness, duplicating the objects of affection and introducing the further rivalry of sex; but he wrote some sonnets which in technical excellence are models of form. The Shakespearian sonnet, composed of three alternate quatrains and a couplet, is based not on the Petrarchan sonnet, but on the English variation first made by the Earl



of Surrey in his sonnets published in Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557). Its seven rimes allow the poet greater freedom than the four or five of the Petrarchan octave and sestet; and indeed the deficiency of rimes to many English words may undoubtedly in the more rigid form be a check to the poet's imagination. The Shakespearian sonnet lacks the magic of the break before the sestet, but it is a flexible and pleasing form with its three succeeding stanzas clinched by a couplet. One quatrain more or less, or the absence of the couplet at the end, would completely alter its linked gracefulness. It retains much of the artifice of the true sonnet and gains a lyrical spontaneity from its stanzaic structure which the Petrarchan sonnet lacks. The final couplet, like the refrain of a *ballade*, sums up the matter of the quatrains in a perfect close that is achieved in no other form of the sonnet. Shakespeare's matter in the *Sonnets* is perfectly adapted to his conventional form. He develops or contrasts his thought in his succeeding quatrains, and concludes magnificently with his final couplet. He keeps excellent accent, and adds to the natural sweetness of his verse by an undercurrent of veiled alliteration and subtle vowel-contrasts. For sheer beauty of thought and expression Sonnets 33, 60, 66, 116 and 146 are comparable in English only to the philosophic reflections of Milton and Wordsworth in sonnet form.

Of the other poems of Shakespeare, *The Passionate Pilgrim* with its "Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music" is only partly by Shakespeare, and it will be noticed that it contains fragments from *Venus and Adonis*, and from *Love's Labour's Lost*. It was a pirated miscellany published in 1599 and attributed to Shakespeare by William Jaggard, the publisher, no doubt to assist its sale. *A Lover's Complaint* is un-Shakespearian in style, and has recently been attributed to Chapman; but *The Phœnix and the Turtle*

was published over Shakespeare's name in 1601. Its meaning is obscure, but it is one of a collection of verses, appended to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr*, 1601, and dedicated to Sir John Salisbury by Jonson, Chapman, Marston, and others.



## VI

### THE PLAYS. I—FORM AND FABLE

SHAKESPEARE learned the art of comedy from Lyly, Greene, and Peele. Once, in the *Comedy of Errors*, he experimented in the mode of Plautus and produced an Elizabethan transmogrification of the *Menaechmi*; but the classical comedy of the Renaissance, as exemplified in England by George Gascoigne's translation of Ariosto's *I Suppositi* as *The Supposes* (1566) left him unmoved. Such "cruel garters" were not for him. Besides, he seems to have disliked realistic comedy. Only one of his comedies, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, offers a humorous picture of middle-class life, and even in that he introduced a romantic masque of children:

"Like urchins, oafs, and fairies, green and white."

And although he introduced "humours," such as Jaques, Malvolio, and Lucio, into his comedies, he shrank from that intellectual comedy of humours which was practised by Ben Jonson.

His earliest comedies were experiments. The *Comedy of Errors*, as we have said, is an attempt to recapture the spirit of classical farce, and to adapt the plot to suit Elizabethan taste. *Love's Labour's Lost* was probably Shakespeare's own invention. It is his slightest play, a succession of humorous situations with little development, mildly satirical of academies and of affected language. It has been suggested that in the studious seclusion of the King

of Navarre and his companions under the tutorage of Don Armado, the Spanish pedant, is satirized some learned association or academy of Shakespeare's age. This is possible, though identification is uncertain and perhaps unnecessary. More interesting is Shakespeare's evident gusto for style, and his mockery of three types of offending eloquence—the elegance of Armado, the narrow pedantry of Holofernes, and Biron's affected conceits.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the most charming and the most original of the earlier comedies. It differs from all Shakespeare's comedies in that the raveller and unraveller of the humorous troubles which beset the earth-born persons of the play is a fairy. Oberon governs the sublunary world. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an Elizabethan vision of prehistoric Athens where Theseus is king, and of dark woods, where fairies glide like fireflies amongst the boles and spreading branches. It is a romantic comedy of pleasing wonder, a phantasmagoria of a hue and cry after eloping lovers through elf-ridden woods, a burlesque theatrical rehearsal scattered by the strange apparition of an ass-man, and the hunting train of Theseus and Hippolyta, which is concluded with the double wealth of a comic tragedy and a fairy masque. Like *Love's Labour's Lost* it is an aristocratic and courtly play, and it has been suggested with some probability that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows traces of the influence of the plays of that most delectable courtly dramatist, John Lyly (1554-1606), the author of the didactic romance *Euphues*. In Lyly's comedies Shakespeare may have found the humour of a clownish underplot of servants and constables. He appreciated, too, it would appear, the brilliance of Lyly's prose dialogue. Hence it is not surprising that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there are fairies as in *Endymion*, a Puck rather like Lyly's Cupid in *Sapho and Phao*,



an ass's head for Bottom corresponding to the ass's ears of Midas, and the dream explained in an epilogue as in *The Woman in the Moon*. But Shakespeare's comedy is more romantic, his fairy lore more charming, and his burlesque more ludicrous than anything that Lyly ever wrote. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the most extravagantly pleasing, the most beautiful, the most delectable of all Shakespeare's comedies as imaginative fiction.

Shakespeare boldly created his mythology of fairyland, which is a synthesis of fiction and folklore. From folklore he took his notion of elves who dislike intruders into their woods, and who enter houses at night to bless or to curse. From folklore, too, came Puck of the merry pranks. Oberon, the King of Fairyland, was derived from fiction. Ever since Lord Berners had translated the French prose romance of *Duke Huon of Bordeaux*, Oberon, the shadowy ruler of the fairies, an enchanter, dwelling in some mysterious eastern kingdom, had been also the literary king of fairyland. Titania is Shakespeare's creation. Clearly Oberon must have as his wife a fairy princess, beautiful, languorous, capricious and sentimental, and the traditional Queen Mab, a mischievous atomy, was no fit mate. Titania is the triple Hecate, the goddess of moonlight, woods, and darkness. Her name suggests titanic stature, but is it not an added touch of humour, particularly when we see her lulled to sleep like a child by a lullaby sung by her nymphs, tiny insect-beings who fight with mice and owls, and steal the honey from the humble-bee by the glow-worm's light? The fairy court follows the moon in its path from east to west. Indeed in some mysterious way Titania is both the moon and a fairy huntress. She, too, has her Endymion, bully Bottom the weaver, master of the dramatic activities of the Athenian tradesmen. Cobweb, Moth, and Peaseblossom are unique. There



were no quaint urchins who sat upon heather bells before Shakespeare invented fairies in the diminutive sense of the word. The influence of Shakespeare's fairy lore upon drama, lyrical poetry, and book illustration is so great that it is incalculable. If only for that, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a classic.

It is strange that *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are each the first and last of their kind. Either was a mode of comedy that Shakespeare never chose to pursue further. And yet the excellence of both substantiates the boast of the publisher of *Troilus and Cressida*, in 1609, that he "never undertook anything comical vainly." Shakespeare found the type of comedy after his own heart in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—a highly romantic story of lovers wracked by trials and conflicts and finally made happy, together with a few interludes of realistic humour drawn from the conversation and habits of servants and witlings. For the first time in his career as a writer of comedies, he found that his dramatic figures seemed really to live; but he was still afraid to let them take the threads of the plot into their own keeping and end the play as their natures demanded. He still brought about, as in all the early comedies, his own preconceived ending, which in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* depended not on the natural consequences of actions and motives, but upon intervention and caprice. And so the play was an experiment which fell short of complete harmony between character and action. But its humanity and its romance attracted him. Perhaps it was because *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* failed of the inimitable ease and consummate perfection of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that Shakespeare proceeded to better his instruction. And *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is the forerunner of the most typical Shakespearian comedies, *The*



*Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and, we might add, of *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespearian comedy is comedy of romantic love. Each comedy is a love story of noble men and women who are crossed, separated, and finally united. The plot of each is romantic in the improbability of an action which is located in a foreign land, so that it shall not challenge reality. Shakespeare's comedies are delightful, rather than satirical or medicinal; and their interest lies in story and character more than in any ethical intention or triumph of structure. The plot of a typical comedy is a love story with a happy ending. Its argument is love's struggle against obstacles. The hero and heroine are often at cross-purposes, and the event is often brought about by the successful tactics of a capable heroine. The very fact that *The Taming of the Shrew* is not conceived in Shakespeare's mode of comedy stamps it as an early experiment, or as a play which was not invented by Shakespeare. In contrast to these unhappy-happy lovers there is usually a humorous lord, a humour in the Jonsonian sense, the creature of affectation or unfortunate disposition. He may play a small part in the development of the action, but his chief function is that of an aristocratic clown who serves to emphasize the sanity and wit of the heroine and hero. Amongst such humours are Jaques, Sir Toby Belch, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Parolles, and Lucio. And in further contrast to the romantic main plot of chequered love, there are farcical interludes exhibiting servants, clowns, watchmen, and other foolish fellows in conversation and action.

The theme of Shakespearian comedy is love thwarted and love triumphant. For Shakespeare's idea of comedy was closely cemented to faith in the sanctity and the essential sanity of true love in the



midst of a world of affectation and foolishness. The lunatic, the lover, and the poet may have close affinity of imagination, as Shakespeare recognized, but he regarded the frenzy of the lover as the portal of common sense. Every successful lover is a potential citizen and freeholder of life. Shakespeare never regarded love or even marriage as a motive for tragedy. No Shakespearian hero is driven to his grave by the bickering, or the cruelty, or the incompatibility, or the "nerves" of a woman. No heroine is wrecked primarily by manly domination, or by vague and repressed desires for freedom, or by that very real wrecker of wedlock, ineptitude in the management of children and servants. According to Shakespeare's comedies, so far from containing the seeds of its own decay, love is so strong, so sane, so wise, that only the extremity of mishap or the most diabolical villainy acting upon it can cloud its perfection. Love is the fine flower of human life. Woman is the civilizing force, attracting man by her beauty, her purity, and her joy; and man is a wild and wayward creature who comes to her to be domesticated. There is a difference even in their loving. Shakespeare's men beseech, persuade, and caress. His women, more nobly planned, yield themselves in a spirit of tenderness and joy with a complete confidence and careless jollity that is the perfect expression of love's secure ecstasy. Yet there is nothing mystical in such love. It leads straightway to the church door, to happy hearths and dancing children. Shakespeare's comedies are the celebration of the love that makes the world go round.

It is hard to say which is the most charming and the most splendid. *The Merchant of Venice* enacts the romantic quest of Bassanio, who stakes the wealth of Antonio, the merchant of Venice, upon the choice of one of three caskets for the wealth and



beauty of Portia. Under the happy influence of the nobility of Portia's character, the fortune-hunter becomes almost an ideal lover, and certainly has to take the second place when Portia undertakes the undoing of Antony's oppressor, the revengeful moneylender Shylock. Shakespeare almost made the Jewish banker a noble figure, loving to wife and child, proud of his religion and race, and incited to an almost pardonable revenge by Antonio's repeated insults. If Shakespeare introduced Shylock as a scheming villain, he took leave of him as a sensitive, outraged Jew. And the story of Antonio—the curious bond, impending death, surprising release—is as dramatic to-day as it was in the fourteenth century when the Florentine lawyer, Ser Giovanni, retold this old folk tale as the story of Giannetto and the Lady of Belmont.

*Much Ado About Nothing*, founded on Bandello's novella, "Timbreo di Cardona," is a comedy of love triumphing over treachery, to which Shakespeare added the interlude of those magnificently conceived humours Beatrice and Benedick, his first experiment in the development of character. The play is developed in a masterly progression to its climax and *dénouement* in Acts IV and V, and is as remarkable for Shakespeare's complete mastery of his combination of scenic and symmetrical structure in five acts, as for its perfect blending of romantic, dramatic, and humorous situations, with varied character and wit.

*As You Like It* is an interesting play, not for its thrills, for it has none, but for its nobility in the conception of the light-hearted fortitude of Rosalind, for its humour and wisdom in the wit of Touchstone and Jaques, and for Shakespeare's implied criticism of human life and its illusions. It enacts a story of tyranny and injustice, softened for the victims by their idyllic life as shepherds and hunters in the



Forest of Arden. There they live free from all cares, save the pangs of love, diverted by the melancholy Jaques and the wisely foolish jests of Touchstone. For though love is popularly supposed to fly out of the window when poverty stalks through the gate, he is the friend of poverty amongst the shepherds of romance. Shakespeare's inspiration for this play was Lodge's pastoral romance, *Rosalynde*. *As You Like It* was an experiment in pastoral romance, a successful experiment which convinces, in spite of convention and unreality, by its native humour and its humanity.

None of these plays excel the earlier *Midsummer Night's Dream* in beauty of rare imagination. Their characterization is more convincing, but they lack aught comparable to the magic of the fairy scenes. Shakespeare was wise not to attempt to surpass perfection. As he became more interested in human nature he found its light and shade even more mysterious and inscrutable than the supernatural simplicity of fairyland. But *Twelfth Night* is not only romantic and humane, it is comic in the widest sense of the word. It plays upon all the organs of delight, the grand keyboard of romantic comedy, the swell of wise and happy ridicule, and the echo of sympathy and satisfaction. Its gentle and medicinal derision of melancholy in Orsino, sentimentality in Olivia, and pompous pride in Malvolio is as delicate as it is happy; and the comic scenes of the play—the folly and humour of Aguecheek and Sir Toby, the mischievous ingenuity of little Maria, the comical misadventures of Viola—are a joy for ever. If the palm must be awarded, it must go to *Twelfth Night*. Others may surpass it in parts, none rivals it as a whole. Shakespeare was never more comic, more romantic, more wise, than in this play. It is the most humorous, and the most delightful of all his comedies.



In Shakespearian comedy, plot is not merely a contrivance invented for the exhibition of wit and humour within a predeterminate form, or designed to permit the antics and self-revelation of certain types of human nature or of "humours" in the Jonsonian sense; but it is a romance with an interest of its own. Shakespeare's characters are never permitted to overtop the story, to hamper its development, or to deflect its interest. His dramatic figures live, but they live within the story, the intention of which is delight. Unlike Jonson and Molière, Shakespeare had no intention of withering up hypocrisy, affectation, or absurdity by satirical scorn. He knew that to laugh at the mental aberrations of others is more depraved than to mock physical disabilities. He wisely realized that men do not correct in themselves the faults which they see satirized in others. One does not esteem oneself less after seeing a vain fellow ruffled. One does not spend more after seeing a fictitious miser tricked. Shakespeare knew that the only happy laughter is that frank and jolly banter which binds us to our fellow-men. His aim was not to satirize, but to charm and delight by the romance of beauty and by all the modes of humour. Hence the plots of his comedies were based on idealized life and fiction, not on any possible or real situation which lends itself to ridicule. Shakespeare never uttered his theory of comedy, but his practice coincides with the demand made by Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry*, written about 1580, that "Comedy should be full of delight." And delight, he pointed out, is not the same as satirical laughter. It is something wider and loftier. "Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling."

The earlier tragi-comedies followed the comedies at intervals, but Shakespeare's mind was bent on tragedy. They were tragedies with an enforced



happy ending. They would be more probable and therefore more real, if the follies of their heroes were allowed to bring about their logical damnation. *All's Well that Ends Well* is an unpleasant play of the devices of a clever girl with a heart of gold to win and woo a headstrong and wilfully arrogant dolt. It is a joyless parallel to *The Taming of the Shrew*. The story is not Shakespeare's invention. Ultimately it was derived from the *novella* of Giglietta di Nerbona in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but he made it his by adoption, deepening the moral baseness of the hero, Bertram, by providing him with his mean friend Parolles. One can only wonder at the cynicism of the title. *Measure for Measure* is a much nobler conception flawed only by the pardon and reinstatement to favour of Angelo at the end. Shakespeare cared little for poetic justice; in Johnson's words: "He makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked." In that he was like life itself, and one may not therefore generally condemn him; but in this play the hypocrisy and treachery of Angelo is presented so forcibly and so vilely that, even if he were able to pardon himself, it is inconceivable that men would ever accept him and restore him. The conduct of the plot, with this final exception, is excellent. The three or four intensely dramatic scenes which arise naturally from the initial complication are magnificently clothed in fine and forceful verse. The three chief characters, Angelo, Claudio, and Isabella, are convincing in fidelity to human frailty and pride. The grimly comic scenes in the prison between Abhorson the executioner, Pompey his assistant, and the prisoner, Bernardine, who refuses to be executed, are, in conception and dramatic function, something between the humour of the watchmen in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the grim mirth of the



gravediggers in *Hamlet*. Lucio, the fantastic fop, is a kindly malcontent and an unkind critic. The theme of the play is the same conflict between lust and chastity as Shakespeare had illustrated earlier in *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. There is little of the magic of romance in these two comedies, and little delight; but they are true to type. They have the same ingredients of love, womanhood, "humour," and clowning as their earlier fore-runners, but the animating spirit of exuberant joy is dead. They are comedies without mirth. They are also Shakespeare's last comedies. When later, at the close of his career, he again invoked the comic muse, the result was quite different, as we shall see.

The "histories," or chronicle plays of Shakespeare, date like the comedies from the earliest beginnings of his dramatic art, and indeed it is uncertain whether he first wrote a history or a comedy. They are a type peculiar to Elizabethan England. Other ages have produced one or two dramas based on historical facts, but none the multitude which the Elizabethans have to show, and Shakespeare wrote more English historical plays than any other single dramatist. Most of the "histories" were written during the twelve years after the defeat of the Armada in 1588. It is generally held that the national feeling aroused by the triumph of the English fleet found a satisfaction in the dramatic representation of scenes of magnificence, pathos, irony, and despair, taken from the lives of the kings of England. That such dramas appealed to the nobility and gentry is not surprising; for therein, as in a mirror, to use Schlegel's phrase, they could see "the intrinsic dignity of the hereditary rank, the difficulties of office, the dangers of usurpation, the inevitable fall of a tyranny, which buries itself under the attempts to obtain a firmer foundation," and lastly, "the ruinous consequences of the weaknesses, errors, and crimes of kings." But that



such plays should appeal to the commonalty shows that over and above its natural love of pageantry, battles, murder, and farce, there was at this time a genuine delight in the splendours and sorrows of English history, and a political interest in the origin and title of the reigning dynasty. These plays are a secular counterpart of the mediæval mystery plays based upon sacred history. As those were drawn ultimately from Bible story, so these were dramatized from the chronicles of England, the chief source being Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle of England*, published in 1577 and again in 1587, a compilation by several hands, pro-Tudor and Protestant in tone, based upon earlier Latin and English chronicles. The affinity between the mysteries and the histories is clearly apparent in Peele's *David and Bethsabe* (1588?), which is a history based on the life of King David as narrated in 2 Samuel, 10-19. There were no other precedents for this type of drama. Hence the historical plays fell less under the chastening influence of Latin drama upon form and style than either tragedy or comedy. Playwrights burrowed into the chronicles of England, and constructed their "histories" as they pleased, not forgetting the popular love of romantic fiction and low comedy.

Shakespeare especially made this kind of play his own. A loyal upholder of monarchy, he was interested in kings. As a poet, the imaginative reconstruction of the picture of the past, with its heraldry, armour, and ermine, pleased him. As a dramatist, he saw the dramatic interest of the conflict betwixt the private inclinations of the king and his public duties as a ruler. He improved upon the accepted type of chronicle play by avoiding the introduction of romantic fiction, and by following up the advance in characterization and unity of action which Marlowe had made in his *Edward II* (entered 1593).



Shakespeare's first chronicle play, if indeed the play be his, must have been *Henry VI* in three parts. The second and third parts of *Henry VI* are generally regarded as revisions of two older "histories"—*The First Part of the Contention between York and Lancaster* (Q. 1594), and *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* (Q. 1595). The first part of *Henry VI* may be Shakespeare's introduction to the trilogy, but more probably, like the others, it was a revision of an older play, in which perhaps Shakespeare had lent a hand. The very complex problem of authorship has never been convincingly solved. If the plays are by Shakespeare they are of interest as an example of his prentice hand in tragedy—the saintly weakness of the character of Henry VI and its political consequences are convincingly drawn—and also as the long-drawn-out prelude to *Richard III*. *Richard III* is conceived as a fiery, dominating figure, the hero, villain, and victim of a tragedy, in the style of Marlowe. Shakespeare drew his scenes from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which were based upon More's *Life of Richard III* (1513). He believed in villains—beings dominated by the spirit of evildoing—and Richard is a contemptible but clever scoundrel, like Don John or Iago, usurping the rights and duties of a king. By emphasizing Richard's abnormality, his craving for power, his persuasiveness, tact, wit, and his unscrupulous cruelty, Shakespeare produced in *Richard III* a magnificent tragedy of over-reaching villainy. *King John*, the picture of a base and mean king, is an early play based upon an older play, entitled *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*. *Richard II*, a drama in the style of Marlowe's *Edward II*, is a portrait of a king marred for honest action by his lack of steadfastness and his artistic temperament. It possesses only a political interest, and lacks the depth of Shakespeare's later tragedies, but its closely followed argument, its unity of action,



its swift course, the pity which the character and suffering of the central figure roused in the beholder, all stamp it as the most flawless tragedy of Shakespeare's early days.

The two parts of *Henry IV* depict the youthful life of Henry V, and, as an underplot to the serious action of this double play in ten acts, there is the comedy of the merry jests of Prince Hal and his roystering companions, Falstaff, prince of humorists, Poins, Bardolph, Pistol, and the rest. The play and its sequel, *Henry V*, are based on Holinshed, but the idea of the merry conceited mirth of Falstaff came to Shakespeare from an earlier play, entitled *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. The original prototype of Falstaff was in this play Sir John Oldcastle, a figure who was a travesty of the real Oldcastle, better known to fame as Lord Cobham, the Protestant martyr. Henry's faithlessness to Falstaff, the sternness with which he condemns Lord Scroop, the seeming cowardice with which he fastens William's challenge upon Fluellen, are all inconsistent with the virtues of a private individual, but they are politic in a king, whose first duty is to act for the good of his subjects, and whose life may not be rashly staked in private excesses and private quarrels. *Henry V* is a portrait of Shakespeare's ideal king—"the mirror of Christian kings"—hardy, reasonable, vivacious, resolute, witty, constant to his word, honest, and religious, a man of action in the best sense of the word. To produce this effect, much of the history of his reign is compressed or omitted altogether; and the result is an epic drama of honour and arms, victory and love. The epic effect is supported both by the highly metaphorical verse and by the chorus. Indeed, the chorus is the finest touch of literary genius in *Henry V*. It preludes each act, and builds an imaginative picture of the events of the drama. It fills in gaps in the narration



which otherwise must have been dramatized in scenes, and so the "history" becomes an epic story with inset dramatic scenes. *Henry V* is the perfection of the historical play. It was impossible for Shakespeare to surpass it, and as with the perfection of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he refused to imitate it. *Henry VIII*, though it was written late in Shakespeare's career, is as episodic as any of the chronicle plays.

Indeed, looseness of structure and lack of dramatic unity of action are the chief defects of this order of drama. The duration of the action extends in imagination over a lengthy period of time; and the action of the play, determined as it is by historical records, lacks as a rule that dramatic complication and contrast of emotional interest which is as characteristic of drama as is conflict. For the most part chronicle plays are a formless succession of scenes enacting the chief happenings of a reign, relieved by battle scenes, and sometimes by comedy. The length of these plays, being determined more by the interest and patience of the audience, and by the time available for their performance, than by the unravelling of dramatic complication, is consequently indefinite. Their division into five acts is often arbitrary, and some, for example *Henry IV* and *Henry VI*, are in successive parts.

Shakespeare's "histories," however, have a larger interest than that of their construction. Sidney's objection to such plays, that they "be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns," is beside the point. For Shakespeare's intention was not to write either "right tragedies" or "right comedies," but to show kingship in action, to portray the character of kings, and to reveal, transformed by poetic imagination, the causes and motives of historical events. Schlegel speaks more convincingly when he says: "The principal features



of the historical events are shown with such fidelity ; their causes, and even their secret springs, are put in such a clear light that we may gain from them a knowledge of history in all its truth ; whilst the living scene makes an impression on the imagination which can never be effaced." Shakespeare was not a precise or an unbiassed historian. He was sometimes wrong, in fact, and more rarely unjust in characterization ; but his imaginative presentment of the triumph and fall of the House of Lancaster, the tragedy of the Yorkist kings, and the succession of the Tudors, still has its value both as poetry and as criticism. The great Duke of Marlborough was only one of the many Englishmen who learned English history at this source. In Shakespeare's chronicle plays the pages of history are unrolled in a chain of living scenes ; and if to-day we find the story not as interesting as the dramas of Cromwell, or Frederick the Great, Napoleon, or Abraham Lincoln, the fault is not Shakespeare's, but of the muse of history who made these heroes live too late to be celebrated by his pen.

These plays have a still further claim upon our interest, for the " history " is the father of Shakespearian tragedy. Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Shakespeare soon turned from the history of England to Germany, Spain, and the East in search of story. There were written " histories " of the lives of *Tamburlaine the Great* ; *Dr. Faustus* ; *Alphonsus, King of Arragon* ; *Selimus* ; *Dido*, and a host beside. Such plays, depicting the rise and fall of a prince together with a portrait of his character, are the true forebears of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Coriolanus*. Indeed, the English historical play had already become tragedy in Marlowe's *Edward II* and in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Richard II*. Regarded as a phase in the development of Elizabethan drama, Shakespearian tragedy is a " history " whose theme



is the study of a personality and its failure, rather than a dramatized record of successive historical events. Attempts to imitate classical tragedy, like *Gorboduc* (1561) by Norton and Sackville, and *Jocasta* (1566) translated by George Gascoigne, were stillborn. Tragedy of revenge, in the style of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1589?), though it had some influence upon Shakespeare's conception of *Hamlet*, led to a peculiar type of melodrama. Domestic tragedy, introduced by the anonymous author of *Arden of Feversham* (before 1592), lacked the imaginative atmosphere which is essential to true greatness. Shakespearian tragedy came into being when Shakespeare passed from writing the English history of *Henry V* to the Roman history of *Julius Cæsar* in 1599.

Having exhausted, as it seemed, the dramatic interest of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, from which, however, he was destined later to procure inspiration for *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare turned in search of historical pastures new to those vivid biographies of the ancient world in which precept is driven home by example and anecdote, the *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, written originally in Greek by Plutarch early in the second century, translated into French by Jacques Amyot, Bishop of Auxerre (1559), and Englished for the Elizabethan world from the French version by Sir Thomas North in 1579. It was North's revised version of 1595 which Shakespeare would buy. He discovered a living picture of the life of the classical age of Rome in the lives of Cæsar, Brutus, and Mark Antony, and a wealth of characterization in reported speeches, sayings, and anecdotes, which must have convinced him immediately of its dramatic value. Here, in the overthrow of the Roman republic and the founding of the empire by Augustus, was the noblest history in the world, if only the human interest of will and passion could be emphasized at the expense of



chronological detail. He fastened on the conflict between two political ideals represented by Cæsar and Brutus, Antony and Cassius, and produced *Julius Cæsar*, one of the most perfect of Shakespeare's plays for its harmony of proportion, nobility of theme, and dignity of style. It is the most masculine of all his plays. Cæsar is represented at the height of his power, failing in health under the crushing strain of power. Brutus and Cassius, lovers of the older freedom of the republic, conspire against the tyrant, and murder him. They fail to maintain their assumed power, owing to the political incompetence of Brutus, and are overthrown in battle by Antony and Octavius, men of meaner clay but of greater political ability. This history of the vengeance of the spirit of Cæsar is also the tragedy of Brutus. In private life, as a Stoic, as a man of noble ideals and blameless actions, Brutus is without flaw; but his disinterested idealism renders him unfit for contact with self-seeking and unscrupulous men in a political world of opportunism and cant. He spares Antony and allows him to raise the mob against the republicans in a magnificently conceived piece of rhetoric at Cæsar's pyre. Brutus is struck down by the recoil, and expiates with his happiness and his life. Here is the germ of one of the essentials of tragedy, the tragic error of the tragic hero, and it was but a short step from the inability of Brutus to the disability of Hamlet.

The sequel to *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, did not follow for six or seven years. It depicts the corruption of the valiant and judicious Antony, one of the vanquishers of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, from a man of ability and action to a nerveless and contemptible barbarian, by the fascination of the supremely beautiful, but utterly capricious and self-indulgent, Cleopatra. It is the tragedy of a voluptuary, and all Shakespeare's art is lavished in the



magnificent descriptions of Oriental ease and pomp. The pictorial splendour of its style suits exactly the disposition of Antony, the artistic-minded soldier.

*Coriolanus*, based on Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* in North's version, followed hard upon *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is a painful play, written in rugged and obscure verse, of the inevitable ruin of a noble soldier by uncompromising pride and disdain. This most powerful theme is logically developed to its climax and event. The plot is simple, and the meaning is obvious and profound. Shakespeare rose to higher heights in the Roman "histories" than in English, because from Plutarch he inherited intrinsically nobler themes. It was not that Rome meant more to Shakespeare than did England, but rather that in North's Plutarch he found not merely as in Holinshed's *Chronicles* an outline of events with summaries of character, but character portrayed in speech and action in such clear-cut detail that it was possible to invest historical events with greater human interest, and with less extraneous detail of subsidiary action and character.

To Shakespeare and to the Elizabethans in general, tragedy was the suffering and death of a notable man. It was inherited from the mediæval conception of tragedy in the fall of a prince. *Troilus and Cressida* might satisfy Aristotle's definition of tragedy as the dramatic representation of an action which is serious, noble, and complete, evoking, and at the same time purifying, the emotions of pity and fear, but Shakespeare probably did not regard *Troilus and Cressida* as a tragedy. His editors scarcely knew how to classify it. They felt that it was not a comedy. They were not sure that it was a tragedy. The ethical view that the function of tragedy is to evoke pity for a failure which is worthy of pity, to inspire courage, and to inculcate nobility and fortitude in adverse fortune, was obscured by the historical



legacy of a conflict, complicated on both sides by dilemmas, terminating in death to the most worthy. Tragedy arose within the historical play. Shakespeare had realized and had enacted in *Richard III* and *Richard II* that character is destiny. It was a view of tragedy which is in conflict with the ancient belief that destiny was in the lap of the gods. Elizabethan tragedy was a history play with characterization emphasized. Hence the Elizabethan tragedies retained the succession of scenes, the violent conflict, the spacious time, the clowning, the complex plot with its multitude of characters, of the history plays. Shakespeare produced a new type of tragedy—tragedy of character.

All Shakespeare's tragedies are also histories: none are freely invented. Even *Othello*, the most romantic of all, was narrated in Cinthio's novel from which ultimately it was derived, either by Shakespeare or another, as a true relation. The Roman tragedies were based on Plutarch's *Lives*, and have as well as their individual interest a political conflict. The other tragedies were dramatized from "histories" like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *King Lear*, or from pseudo-historical fiction like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*.

Shakespeare's conception of tragedy was the pathos of the failure and fall of a hero, and pity for unrealized happy possibilities. The hero is a noble, though not necessarily a wholly sympathetic figure, greater in rank and opportunity than most of mankind. His failure is due partly to chance or fate, but chiefly to himself. Some accentuated passion, or some error of judgment is allowed to wreck his life. His fall usually involves that of the woman who is dearest to him, and these are Shakespeare's nearest approach to tragic heroines. He has no independent figures like Antigone or Elektra. The character of the tragic hero is thus essential to the development of the action, and is



utterly involved in the complication and climax of the plot. His death is its logical event, but the pathos of the tragedy resides not in his final fall, but in his failure.

*Romeo and Juliet* stands somewhat apart from the rest in that it is conceived rather as the converse of a Shakespearian comedy, and the event is determined more by unluck than by a combination of character and circumstances. In the later tragedies the action is developed to its outcome by some "fundamental kink" in the character of the hero, some excess or defect of the harmonious and happy mean, emphasized by circumstances unfavourable to recovery when once the first false step has been taken. Hamlet's indecision forces him to spare his uncle at prayer. When next the opportunity occurs, his own life is already slipping from him. Othello's credulity causes him never to allow Desdemona to explain. When he hears the truth, it is too late. In this sense—but it would be folly to push the argument too far—Shakespearian tragedy is the counterpart of the comedy of manners: the latter ridicules folly, the former pities error. It is tragedy of character, not of chance and fate.

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves."

The stories which form the plots of Shakespeare's tragedies were borrowed and elaborated, we must assume, not only for their romantic beauty, but because they were especially suited for Shakespeare's idea of tragedy. Each ends with the death of the hero. In each the action may be considered as rising from and actuated by the character of the hero. In each the hero's fall may be attributed to a defect of character or judgment. In each, also, there is a conflict in the hero's mind between inclination and obvious duty, and an intensity of emotion which

verges on insanity. Lear goes mad. Othello raves and falls in a trance. Even Hamlet and Macbeth are unhinged. Sometimes this conflict is expressed, as in Hamlet's soliloquies. Often it is simply implied, as in Othello's ecstasy over the sleeping Desdemona :

"It is the cause ; it is the cause, my soul."

When once the inspiration of the romantic story had set Shakespeare's dramatic genius to work picturing scenes and dialogue, amplifying character in accordance with the demands of the tragic idea, he began to draft the form of the play in scenes unlimited by the demands of the unities of time and place, each a step forward towards the end. Sometimes he was able to use the story as it came to him, reserving his creative powers for characterization and dialogue. Sometimes he altered the story to suit his idea, as in *Macbeth* for example, where the incidents are made to follow each other more rapidly than in Holinshed's *Chronicle of Scotland* ; and the murder scene is taken from the murder of King Duff by Donwald and his wife, not from the history of Macbeth. Or again in *King Lear*, where he substituted the inevitable and sublime tragic ending for Lear's victory and restoration, and duplicated the theme of filial ingratitude by introducing the underplot of Gloucester and his sons. In each tragedy he begins by skilfully setting forth the initial situation. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, in particular, have striking and alluring opening scenes. The conflict between the hero and his opponents is suggested in scenes which seem to give an advantage first to one side, then to the other. The action reaches a crisis. The hero takes the fateful step and plunges to ruin. In *King Lear*, as out of due place, this comes in the very first scene. His distress is heightened by the mocking contrast of grimly comic clowning. Sometimes there



is a hint that, after all, the death of the hero may be averted. Macbeth pins his hope in the prophecy of the witches :

“ Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane  
I cannot taint with fear.”

Edgar triumphs over Edmund, in *King Lear*, and it seems as if the fortunes of war will turn finally in favour of Lear and Cordelia. Hamlet escapes the king's counterstroke by courageously boarding the pirate ship, and arrives in Denmark to act against the tyrant straightway :

“ It will be short : the interim is mine ;  
And a man's life no more than to say ‘ One.’ ”

But this straw of hope sinks with the drowning man. His struggle with the overwhelming tide of his self-created fate is in vain. The inevitable catastrophe follows, bringing as in real life a disproportionate allotment of sorrow. The innocent also are involved in its mortal coil, and suffer alike with the erring and the culpable.

*Hamlet* is generally considered the greatest of the tragedies. Its hero is more sympathetic, because more nearly human and credible, than any of the tragic heroes. It represents the outward struggle of an avenger against the tyrant who has wronged him. It suggests with deep understanding of the human heart the inward conflict of a heart too sceptical to believe the supernatural origin of his impulse to revenge, of a mind too sensitive to command the arm to urge the sword, and yet too conscientious to renounce this obvious filial duty :

“ Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike.”

Consequently this melancholy, overwrought mind is tortured by self-accusation of dilatory cowardice, and tempted to self-murder. Failing from nicety to

take his only opportunity of revenge, he achieves it at last merely by accident in the midst of a counter-plot which brings about his own death. The play cost Shakespeare many years of thought and revision. Ultimately the story of Hamlet's assumed madness and revenge came to Elizabethan England from Denmark through the French version in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, but there was an earlier English play, now lost, on the same subject. Possibly from this Shakespeare drew the inspiration for his first draft of the play, of which the quarto of 1603 is a mangled and defective version.

*Macbeth* is equally romantic in its use of supernatural interest, and even more imaginative in its lurid passion of crime and punishment, but the treachery of the hero unfits him for the sympathy which is accorded to Hamlet, Othello, and Lear. It is a tragedy of desire for rank and power, prompted by witchcraft, fanned by the ambition of Lady Macbeth, and turned to fires of vengeance by the unholy means by which it is accomplished. The overwrought mind of Macbeth before the murder of Duncan, and of Lady Macbeth in remorse, are amongst the highest flights of Shakespeare's sympathetic imagination. The style of this tragedy is in keeping with the subject. It is the most Gothic of all. The romantic scenery, the barbaric past, the fire and smother of passion and hesitation are suggested, rather than drawn, in images of tumultuous splendour. The form resembles that of *Julius Cæsar*, but is more condensed; and has a temptation, not an ideal, as the motive of the action. The version which we possess is probably not Shakespeare's perfect copy of the play, but rather an abridged version, made shortly before or after his death, with the addition of two songs from Middleton's *Witch*.

*Othello*, an excellent acting play, both for its swiftness and its exceeding pity, is a dramatic version of



an Italian *novella* by Geraldo Cinthio. Its fine opening and overwhelming ending scarcely compensate for the plot, which is simply the gulling of Cassio, Roderigo, and Othello in turn by a mischievous self-seeking hypocrite, Iago. Iago is so much the central figure that the honourable and simple Othello becomes almost a secondary figure. He is no match for the consummate duplicity of the villain. There is no conflict, because he makes no struggle in the net. *Othello* is a tragedy of pity for the mental anguish of Othello, and for the undeserved fate of the innocent Desdemona who becomes so helplessly involved in the cunning snare of Iago. Iago is Shakespeare's most accomplished smiling villain. Such characters are unknown both in ancient literature and in modern life. No human being was ever such an incarnate devil as this. But Shakespeare believed in him, as he believed in Richard III and Edmund, and possibly not without cause. The Renaissance, with its emphasis of the pride and the glory of power, and its destruction of the fear of God, created, in Italy especially, men as beasts, who for power were willing to deal doubly, lie, cheat, betray, stab, and poison. Iago is not merely a cheat, or a malcontent: he is a diabolical scoundrel whose head is as acute as his heart is cruel. The play is his tragedy as well as Othello's.

The spiritual tragedy of *King Lear* cannot be represented on the stage. It is a tragedy not of terror, but of prolonged and acute passion. The story, shorn of its suffering, is simply a childish tale of an old man's stupidity, and as Lamb says: "to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter, and relieve him." The greatness of the play is not in its plot, but in its theme—the mind of a proud but



generous old king stricken by and in revolt against the hard and calculating antagonism of his unworthy daughters, and this is carried to such a pitch and extremity of passion, contrasted by the similar state of Gloucester, and heightened by the imbecile ravings of the fool, that it is the most perfect expression of calamity in Shakespeare's works—nay, of all time. The fateful step is taken in the first scene, Lear's conflict is almost entirely mental, and the tragic end—the death of Cordelia, and Lear's unsufferable and inexpressible grief—is the only possible fitting conclusion to the anguish of the play. The tragic ending is Shakespeare's own. The story as Shakespeare read it in Holinshed ended with the happy victory of Lear and his French allies. In making the story forever his, Shakespeare improved upon "history." He saw that after Lear's intolerable anguish, restoration even to manhood was untrue to nature. Death was happier far: death is victory.

The earlier *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet* are incomparable to the perfection of the mature tragedies. *Titus Andronicus* is a crude but forceful tragedy of wrong and revenge, which contains the germ of the passion and madness of Lear. Possibly it was an earlier play by another author, which Shakespeare revised. *Romeo and Juliet* stands apart. In its picture of romantic lovers willing to sacrifice all for love, in its expression of youthful ardour and ecstasy, it is unique. It is one of the plays which, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*, have exerted a stronger literary influence than all the rest put together. Shakespeare learned the story from the poem of Arthur Brooke, *Romeus and Juliet* (1562), based upon an Italian *novella* of Bandello (1554), who retold a celebrated story of the Italian renaissance. It was an excellent choice for the young poet, and he never attempted to surpass the lyrical felicity of this dramatic poem. In its



short but vivid characterization of the lovers, Mercutio, and the Nurse, in its contrast of rivalry, love and death, in its poetic fancy, its charm, and its pathos, it is a thing of lasting beauty and delight, too perfect to be clapperclawed by criticism of any kind.

*Troilus and Cressida* is a tragedy of violated love uncompleted by death. It is a dramatic version of Chaucer's pitiful romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, made more rancid by the addition of Thersites with his foul mouth and rank wit. If Shakespeare ever wished to revile the picture of romantic love which he had drawn in *Romeo and Juliet*, to depict men as either fools or knaves, and women as creatures of clay, he could not have done it more completely than in this bitter and unpleasant play. The disillusionment of Troilus by the deception of the light woman Cressida seems to come straight from the heart of a chagrined poet.

The spirit of the play is paralleled by that of *Timon of Athens*, the tragedy of a generous, open-hearted soul who imagines, when poverty knocks at the door, that extravagant spending and giving is a claim not merely to credit, but to reciprocal generosity. Disillusioned of his childlike trust, his heart turns to gall and bitterness. After mocking his former friends with a splendidly appointed feast of warm water, he retires to the woods to nurse his hate of mankind. He discovers gold buried near his cave, but refuses to use it; and, after rejecting all offers of renewed friendship, and the military command of the Athenians against Alcibiades, dies by his own hand. In contrast to this jaundiced misanthrope there is the man of action, Alcibiades, who, thwarted of a generous wish by the Athenian senate, takes arms against his wrongs, and enforces the senators to his will. It is a tragedy which appears to have been inspired by *Coriolanus*. The outraged Corio-



lanus turns his hand against his native city, and falls by the steel of her foes. Timon revolts against mankind, and his spleen destroys him. But the spirit of Timon's misanthropy is so heartfelt and outspoken that it appears to come from a jaded and depressed mind.

Was Shakespeare ailing, or cut to the quick by real or fancied wrongs? We cannot say. Such imaginative identification with the fancied wrongs of a disillusioned spirit was not beyond the genius of the creator of *Hamlet*, or *Coriolanus*; but, granted that, why should Shakespeare find pleasure in such Dead Sea fruit? One can only assume that periods of overwork and nervous strain brought in their train long moods of depression in which at various times *Hamlet*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Coriolanus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and finally *Timon of Athens* were composed. To say that *Timon of Athens* is partly or wholly not by Shakespeare, because the imaginative conception is not so great as that of the greatest tragedies, or because it lacks the sympathetic passion of his mellow heart, is to claim to go beyond the knowledge of Hemming and Condell, two members of the King's Company and bosom friends of Shakespeare, and to accept and reject at will portions of plays included in the First Folio. That is not criticism: it is caprice. *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens* are jaundiced plays, and though not great, they are of interest in showing that in Shakespeare's maturity there were streaks of gall as well as the strength and sweetness of head and heart.

In the last plays, written in all probability after Shakespeare's retirement from the stage as an actor, we approach a very different kind of comedy from *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Fashion in comedy had changed, and to some extent Shakespeare followed popular taste. The "old comedy" of Lyly, Greene and Peele had



died soon after the authors, and Ben Jonson and the realistic school held the comic stage. Shakespeare had written somewhat in Jonson's style *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and had slipped a "humour" or two into most of his later comedies; but he had little delight in the realistic comedy of Jonson, Chapman, Middleton and Dekker. He loved romance, and romantic comedy was his true field. Like the comedies, the last plays were grounded on romantic fiction. *Pericles* is founded upon a romance in Twine's *Pattern of Painful Adventures* which was derived ultimately from the Latin romance of *Apollonius of Tyre*. *Cymbeline* draws its romance from the story of Ginevra in the *Decameron*. *A Winter's Tale* is a dramatic version of Greene's novel *Pandosto*. Popular taste called for either realistic comedy or wildly romantic tragi-comedy. Romantic comedy was made thrilling by the introduction of a sustained tragic element, resolved at the close by a happy ending. As history developed into tragedy, so romantic comedy became tragi-comedy.

An apt comparison of Shakespeare's last plays is offered by the tragi-comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher written about this time, *Philaster*, and *A King and No King*, and their magnificently theatrical melodrama, *The Maid's Tragedy*. That Shakespeare was intimate with Fletcher is indicated by their collaboration in *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. It is uncertain whether *Cymbeline* or *Philaster* was written first. It is probable, as Beaumont and Fletcher often did Shakespeare the honour of imitating his characters and scenes, that he set the fashion. Probably all felt the pulse of fashion and gratified its weakness. The tragi-comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher are in complete contrast both to the old comedy and the new realistic comedy. They revelled in the delineation of the passions, and in the contrast of virtue with jealousy, treachery, and tyranny.



Fidelity to human nature, in which Shakespeare had excelled, was largely ignored for the sake of striking contrast and dramatic changes. They delighted in startling scenes, emotional or even horrifying, with spectacular appeal to the eye, and music to charm the ear. To secure a happy ending, they did not hesitate to bring about sudden and unexpected conversions of character. Tragic themes were made into comedy by a happy ending, and comedy became thrilling and melodramatic.

Shakespeare's last comedies, like the earlier comedies, have as their theme love's triumphs over obstacles, but the story chosen was a highly romantic tale of wrong, leading the victims of the tyranny to hardships or adventures which are terminated by the melting of the tyrant's heart and a happy change both of character and situation. Full of improbabilities are these tragi-comedies, and their love interest is sentimental. Shakespeare was older when he wrote them, and looked upon his lovers with a difference. No longer were they his contemporaries, he regarded them almost as children. He saw them with the wise mind of an elderly friend. They are not free agents like Portia and Bassanio, Rosalind and Orlando; but rather the victims of a tyranny, or the creations of a dramatic situation. From being minor figures in the plays, the aristocratic "dukes" of comedy have become ruling figures—Cymbeline and his queen, Leontes, Prospero. The "low comedy" of the comical characters is also different. Twelve years earlier, audiences had expected a fool. Shakespeare gave them Launcelot, Bottom, Touchstone, and Feste. They are hearties all, but looking at them critically and without sentiment, it is obvious that they are opportunities for the drolleries of low comedians rather than intrinsically dramatic figures. Their function is to be at once the argumentative servant and the outspoken critic. If they are



fools in motley, like Touchstone and Feste, they add to this the frank witticisms of the professional jester. But the comical characters of the latest plays are not only "originals," humorous in themselves, they play a definite part in the plot, like Cloten in *Cymbeline*, Autolycus in *A Winter's Tale*, and those rare conspirators Trinculo and Stephano in *The Tempest*.

Music, too, plays a larger part, owing to the fashion of masques at Court. In 1608 Ben Jonson made an innovation in his court masques. He introduced a grotesque contrast to the splendour and beauty of the noble masquers by an anti-masque of "antics" dressed in strange shapes, danced and acted by players from the theatres. Naturally the actors found opportunity to introduce these masques and anti-masques into their plays, together with some imitation of the richer staging of the private theatre. The introduction of short masques—musical interludes in which one or two principal figures introduce dancers dressed as shepherds, fauns, nymphs, or in some other romantic disguising, and sing a song or two—is not entirely confined to Shakespeare's last comedies. There was a masque of Hymen in *As You Like It*, and the fairy epilogue to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has some affinity to this kind of entertainment. But they are one of the characteristics of the last tragi-comedies, and their presence in these plays indicates a public appreciation of toys of this sort, cultivated no doubt by the masques of Whitehall and the Inns of Court. It was an indication of the popular love of music in the Jacobean period, and an evidence of Shakespeare's readiness to develop a musical sort of comedy to suit popular taste. It was also an indirect confession that the old romantic comedy had lost its charm, and needed musical sugar-plums to make it palatable. Popular taste in comedy in 1610 was not so excellent as it had been ten or fifteen years earlier. It preferred a



drama which surprised by its sensationalism to the happy mean of story and character, dramatic situation and human interest, which Shakespeare had perfected in *Twelfth Night*.

The drama which bears the same relation to Shakespeare's tragi-comedies as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* bore to the comedies is *Pericles*, an undramatic, and except for a couple of finely conceived scenes, a tedious play. Its plot, the romance of a lost daughter, a motive which is an element of plot both in *Cymbeline* and *A Winter's Tale*, is disconnected and lacking in both beauty and significance. It must have been written in 1608, for the second edition of Twine's *Painful Adventures*, the immediate original of its plot, came out only in 1607, and the first quarto of *Pericles*, published by Henry Gosson and ascribed to Shakespeare, appeared in 1609. It was a popular play, as many allusions in contemporary verse attest, and it went through six editions in quarto before it found a place in the third Folio. The ascription to Shakespeare is not certain evidence that Shakespeare wrote it. Many plays published in quarto were attributed to Shakespeare, and most are certainly not his. But many Elizabethan plays were written in collaboration. The plot was outlined, the list of persons and the scenes drafted, and then two or three dramatists set to work to dramatize the play. *Henry VIII* was such a play. *Pericles* was almost certainly another. And because a prose romance called *The Painful Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, was published immediately after Shakespeare's play in 1608 by an inferior writer named George Wilkins, it is usually held that Wilkins composed the dull and base parts of the play, including the prologue and choruses spoken by Gower, and that Shakespeare wrote as much of Acts III, IV and V as one cares to believe. This is pure supposition. It is just as likely that Shakespeare wrote



none of it, as that he wrote some or all; but if any of this play is his it is, surely, Act III, Scene i, a scene which anticipates the opening scene of *The Tempest*. The atmosphere of storm and confusion is cleverly suggested by the impassioned descriptive touches in the speeches of Pericles and by the technical jargon of mariners of the old school of galleons and carracks. Such a scene was a novelty in Shakespeare's age, and this was one of the first of similar scenes ever represented on the stage. The fact that *Pericles* was not published by Hemming and Condell in the First Folio appears to indicate that its title to be regarded as Shakespeare's was not as sound as that of the plays which they included.

*Cymbeline*, though by no means a good play, is infinitely superior to the vagaries of *Pericles*. The introduction is not in Shakespeare's most skilful manner, but in what was a new method, the situation being disclosed in narrative allotted to two gentlemen in turn, in the manner of Massinger and later dramatists. The chief excellence of the play is the bright purity of Imogen in a coarse and stupid court, and her fortitude and radiant love when exposed to insult and shame by the incredible stupidity of her husband, Posthumus, and subsequently to slander and the shadow of death. The scenes in the forest of Wales echo the fairytale of "Schneewitchen," and there is an intentional contrast of the court, the home of slander and villainy, with the barbaric mountains of the west, the home of healthy and natural family life. When young, Shakespeare laughed at pastoralism in *As You Like It*: in his middle age in *Cymbeline* and *A Winter's Tale* he was a convert, not to the pastoralism that never was, but to the rude health and honesty of the lives of hunters and shepherds.

*A Winter's Tale* expresses the same contrast: no happiness in the court of a tyrant, all joy in honest



country toil. Its plot is melodramatic and impossible ; its form is careless and loose ; but it is a good acting play, and the charm of its love-scene is comparable to no other scene in earlier comedy.

*The Tempest* surpasses all its contemporaries in the variety and grace of its conception, and the skill and beauty of its dramatic form. It is one of the richest of Shakespeare's plays, a romantic comedy with just a threat of tragedy, a fantasy of the New World made more delectable by supernatural illusions and music. Like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it can never be satisfactorily represented on the stage. Prospero must be a man, and yet something more than a man. Caliban must be a man, and yet something brutish and monstrous. Miranda must be what no actress can possibly represent—Miranda. Ariel is as impossible of representation as the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is the indefinable beauty, this fleeting sense of something otherworldly that melts like snow in the hand, which raises the play far above the world of observation and memory into the realm of imagination and sunset emotions. It is hard to say what means this allegory of an exiled duke, who controls a genius of the air, who enslaves the son of an exiled witch, and finally, after bringing about by magic the marriage of his daughter and the restoration of his dukedom, goes back to rule his territory with pardons for all his enemies. It is strange indeed, if there is nothing of Shakespeare's thought transmuted into this fiction. It is as it were an allegory of Shakespeare the bewitching dramatist now making a final wave of his magic wand, preparatory to his retirement not indeed to his dukedom, but to his estate at Stratford. The hope of retirement, his eagerness for reconciliation and mutual forgiveness, and the famous speech of renunciation (V, i, 33-57) beginning :

“Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,”



all appear to be tinged with such thoughts as Shakespeare must have had, when aged forty-seven he was thinking of retiring from the London stage to the home of his boyhood.

*The Tempest* is the very summit of Shakespeare's romantic imagination. The distant desert island, with its yellow sands, its blue seas, and its beetling cliffs, is a fitting scene for the magic of Prospero assisted by Ariel, his spirit of air and light. There is realism and terror—that unconvincing terror which is really a thrilling delight—in the scene of the shipwreck. There is beauty and sentiment in the simple love of Miranda and Ferdinand. What else more could one wish to see than idyllic love in such a setting of sunlit blue and gold! But the shipwreck upsets the natural equilibrium of shipmates and passengers. The lower and meaner mortals see an easy and unprincipled way of putting down the mighty from their seats. There is treachery toward; treachery erring rather than malignant, which is countered by the magic of Prospero, and forgiven and forgotten in love and reconciliation at the end of the play. It is an unreal and romantic play, and its very unreality gave Shakespeare for a moment a glimpse of philosophical truth. Formerly he had seen a similarity between life and drama:

"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,"

he makes Jaques say in *As You Like It* (II, vii, 140). But in *The Tempest* he approaches a more idealistic view of life. Just as the masque of Ceres and Juno fades away into thin air at the bidding of its creator, so the world shall fade:

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

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The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind."

Life is unreal, a dream, an illusion.

" We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

A play which could be the occasion of such a wedding of beauty to truth is no mean play. And with that we take leave of the plays. Prospero releases Ariel and drops his wizard's mantle. A merry shipload of friends and reconciled enemies sets sail for Naples. Only Caliban is left on the island, watching with resentful vision the proud galleon passing into the night. The sun smiles in a west of fire and gold. The island fades in the darkness. Only Caliban remains, forlorn, inscrutable, a fit victim for a new tyranny.



## VII

### THE PLAYS. II—SOURCES AND INTENTION

THE plots of Shakespeare's plays with few exceptions are all variations and elaborations of time-tried and approved tales or histories. In the comedies he usually dramatized the romance of the winning of a bride, with variations of mistaken identity, trickery, and disguise, and the addition by way of contrast, of one or two oddities or humours, who are both creators of mirth and objects of mild derision. Villainy vanquished, and tyranny reconciled to virtue, are the inevitable themes of his tragicomedies. The tragedies are more varied. Four, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Macbeth*, are stories of crime and revenge. Three, *Troilus and Cressida*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, are tragedies of misplaced affection. Three more, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Coriolanus*, might by a happy ending become tragi-comedies. But for Shakespeare's insistence upon unlucky chance, *Romeo and Juliet* might have ended with something like the final happiness and reconciliation of *A Winter's Tale*. If Shakespeare had chosen to make it clear to Othello that Desdemona was falsely accused, Othello's credulity might have been as easily remedied as that of Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*. If in a comic humour Shakespeare had cared to depart from the traditional story, the disdain of Coriolanus might

have been made to appear as ridiculous as the pride of Malvolio.

Shakespeare's constructive talent is to be seen rather in the poetry with which he invested the fictions or narratives of others, than in his original grasp of plot. He rarely troubled to invent. He preferred to adapt either old plays, or history, or romantic fiction, to his intention. No single source has been discovered for either *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Probably they were suggested by several inspirations combined. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, is probably the result of observation, an imaginative hint from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, the recollection of the fable of Pyramus and Thisbe from the *Metamorphoses*, and a mind stored with fairy lore. Older historical plays however he made the basis of 2 *Henry VI* (*First Part of the Contention between the two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, about 1590), 3 *Henry VI* (*The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York*, about 1590), *King John* (*The Troublesome Reign of King John*, about 1591), *Henry IV* and *Henry V* (*The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, about 1586). Probably the early comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* (? *History of Error*, 1576), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (? *Felix and Philomena*, 1584), and *The Merchant of Venice* (? *The Jew*, before 1579) were revisions or otherwise reconstructions of earlier comedies ; and possibly *The Tempest* is based on an old play. Certainly *The Taming of the Shrew* (*The Taming of A Shrew*, 1589), and *Measure for Measure* (Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, 1578) were derived from older plays, and it is probable that the inspiration for *King Lear* came from *The Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters*, about 1590 ; and that Shakespeare's first version of *Hamlet*, Q 1, owes much to the earlier lost play on the same subject.



But most of Shakespeare's plays were dramatized from narratives which he found in the history and the fiction of his age. Holinshed's *Chronicles* provided him with material for all the English historical plays (except *Henry VI* and *King John*), and also for *Macbeth*, and to some extent for *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*. North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* was the source of *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. Possibly also it gave to Shakespeare or his collaborator hints for *Timon of Athens*, though the matter of this play (or of the earlier draft which Shakespeare is supposed to have revised) was derived chiefly from an Elizabethan collection of romantic stories called Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, which narrated also the tales which form the plots of *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well that Ends Well*.

Italian *novelle* provided the originals ultimately of *Romeo and Juliet* (Bandello's *Romeo e Giulietta*, in his *Novelle*, 1554), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Bandello's *Timbreo di Cardona*), *Twelfth Night* (several possible Italian sources—Bandello's *Nicuola*, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, V, 8, 1565, also Italian plays: *Gl' Ingannati*, 1537, and Secchi's *Gl' Inganni*, 1562), *All's Well that Ends Well* (Boccaccio's *Decameron*, III, 9), *Measure for Measure* (Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, VIII, 5), *Othello* (Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, III, 7) and *Cymbeline* (Boccaccio's *Decameron*, II, 9): though probably in every instance Shakespeare learned the story from some intermediate source. For *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, he was under obligation to Arthur Brooke's poem *Romeus and Juliet*, 1562. Chaucer furnished the plot of *Troilus and Cressida* ("Troilus and Criseyde") and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (*Canterbury Tales*, "The Knight's Tale"). Two comedies were dramatized from English prose fiction. As *You Like It* is a dramatic version of Lodge's *Rosalynd* (1590); and Greene's *Pandosto* (1588), furnished Shakespeare with the plot of *A Winter's Tale*.



*Pericles*, ultimately derived from a Latin prose romance of the dark ages, *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, was more immediately based on the English version of Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Bk. VIII, and Laurence Twine's romance, *The Pattern of Painful Adventures*, 1576. The sources of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest* are unknown.<sup>1</sup> Finally, none of the plays show the direct influence of classical drama. Even *The Comedy of Errors* was not inspired directly by the *Menæchmi* of Plautus.

Shakespeare never attempted, save once, in *The Merry Wives*, to dramatize his main plots from the life that he saw around him. He fled from the plainness of reality to the enchantment of distance. Although his historical incidents and characters were drawn from the chronicles, he improved upon history; and his comedies and tragedies are a poetical transformation of life into romantic story. Yet, in avoiding realism, his genius conceived and uttered a more vital and fascinating illusion of imaginative personality than any other dramatist. His stories are often palpably false and impossible; his characters are true to nature and to life.

His methods of dramatization are now obscure. We can only conjecture how he worked. His early plays were either the reshaping revision of older plays, or original comedy plots. The plays of the middle period of his career were chiefly dramatizations of history and romantic fiction. His later plays were partly his own dramatization of fiction, and partly works written, it is believed, in collaboration with other dramatists. *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are usually regarded by Shakespearian scholars as the work of two or more hands; but whether others planned

<sup>1</sup> The suggestion that *The Tempest* is based on a tale in Antonio de Eslava's *Las Noches de Invierno*, has not found general acceptance.



and Shakespeare revised, whether others completed unfinished works of his, or whether Shakespeare and his collaborators worked in partnership, is anything but clear. The whole question of Shakespeare's collaboration with other men at the beginning and at the end of his career is lamentably obscure; and even of the unquestioned plays we are often uncertain whether the text transmitted in the Folio is that of Shakespeare's play as written by him, or a version of that play made by actors for stage performance, and accepted by his editors in default of a more authentic copy.

In his original plays he appears to have built up the story from a happy inspiration. Falstaff in love, says tradition, was the theme suggested by Queen Elizabeth to the author of *Henry IV*. From this hint Shakespeare, one must assume, imagined Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, created husbands for them, and concocted an underplot for the followers and servants of Falstaff and their friends. Given roguery and rivalry, the rest came naturally. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare appears to have thought of fairies, and then to have let the human comedy develop from that. In *The Tempest*, Prospero and his enchanted island are the germ of the story. If magic be removed, nothing is left but two ordinary tales of love and treachery. But as a rule Shakespeare preferred to base his poetry upon some already existing fiction, which promised well. In the earlier plays which he adapted from old plays, he either recast, or took over and rewrote in the magic of his insight and vision those scenes which seemed essential to the play as he conceived it. He rejected old and added new scenes to develop his own particular conception of the characterization. When Shakespeare dramatized chronicles or biographies he selected his characters and an outline of events, shaping it for dramatic purposes in his own way, and colouring it with his own humour, passion, and



reflections upon life. Often he retained, and amplified in blank verse, the historical speeches of the character, and anecdotes illustrative of character. Sometimes he added from the wealth of his imagination new characters and humorous underplots. All he demanded of the chronicles was that they should offer an example of kingship in action. Of Plutarch's *Lives* he demanded more, namely richness of character, political interest, and tragical history fraught with ethical significance. From the fiction of the novelists, Shakespeare required a story with a dramatic situation, and opportunity for the exercise of pathos and humour, wit, and satire. Sometimes he altered the story to suit his dramatic ends, usually he retained it with all its imperfections on its head; but in dramatizing novels, always he refashioned the characters of the story after his own conception of human nature, and invented his own dialogue.

He appears to have compiled and adapted freely, taking his requirements where he found them. "If reading be the food of romance," he said in effect, "give me more books, and again more books. Let me ransack the world for plots that contain a truly dramatic situation." He preferred to borrow or to adapt, rather than to sit down and wait for the coming of an original plot. The incredibilities of *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*—to mention only three plays—seem to indicate that verisimilitude and probability meant little to him. What he demanded of a story was a dramatic situation or two, worthy of a grand scene such as the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, Lear in the storm, or the pleading of Claudio with Isabella. Given scenes that roused his sympathy, he rose to the occasion and breathed imagination into the fiction. No matter how stupid or lifeless the story, the dry names took form, and became living creatures of the imagination. This is Shakespeare's greatest



endowment of genius. Other dramatists have built with greater regularity of plot, and with academic structure, doing wonderful feats of skill in the gyves of the dramatic unities of action, place and time. No dramatist in any age or land has ever made his imaginative puppets so lifelike, or their imaginary life so vivid and utterly convincing. "His *Characters* are so much Nature herself that 'tis a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her . . . every single character in *Shakespeare* is as much an Individual as those in Life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike, and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be Twins, will upon comparison be found remarkably distinct." Pope spoke the language of enthusiasm in this passage from his preface, but it is the truth.

Shakespeare took care of the scenes, and let the acts take care of themselves. He could flit from scene to scene with scarcely a break, except when one group of actors retired and another group took their places, for he had no backgrounds of scenery and no curtain to consider, and he regarded a narrative "chorus" as optional. His fifteen or thirty scenes—the number was indefinite—correspond to the chapters of a novel. But he was often heedless in execution, and though he had an eye for climax, he was often careless of the cumulative effect. Like the chapter, the scene is not always a satisfactory part of the whole. In a perfect play of this type, in *The Tempest* for example, there is no scene which is not vital to the representation of the plot, and nothing omitted which is essential to the story. But Shakespeare was often careless. He would introduce a clown or a fool, regardless of fitness, "though in the meantime," to quote Hamlet, "some necessary question of the play be then to be considered." He would let an attractive scene outstrip its purpose through sheer delight in it, and pare another scene,



necessary to the story but dull, to the quick in order to save time. He did not scruple to frame a scene on occasion merely in order to introduce a song. Sometimes he actually forgot. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, assuming the play in the Folio to be Shakespeare's, Christopher Sly, the henpecked drunkard, is brought on the stage in the Induction, and remains watching the play; but no provision is made for removing him, and the obvious scene in which Sly is made aware of the jest, and retires vowing to practise Petruchio's lesson upon his own shrewish wife, is omitted.

Shakespeare wrote before the art of economy of means and balanced form was in England fully realized. The general effect of his method of structure is that certain scenes, brilliant and intense in dramatic interest, stand out; whilst the rest may be regarded as connecting links. Some of these may at times fall far below the level of the play. Yet there is indication of purpose in his scenes, which is clear when one compares play with play and deduces his method. He begins by explaining the preliminaries of the action. Sometimes he does this in an arresting scene which arouses and satisfies curiosity. Sometimes he does it by narration. But however it is done, the audience is asked in effect to concede a given situation. It may be absurd. That scarcely matters. Once the situation is outlined, the chief characters are introduced in one or more scenes, and the action begins to move forward. The characters begin to live in the scenes of the story, which flits from place to place, advancing the plot stage by stage, throwing first one character, then another, into prominence, adding fresh complications and new interests, explaining motives, amplifying characterization, until the action is finally centred in one scene where all the principals meet—a wedding, a battle, a reconciliation, a death—and the play ends with the



inevitable outcome of this scene and all that had led up to it.

What did a play mean to Shakespeare? Was it merely another twenty pounds, another bursting cash-box for the shareholders, another step on the road to wealth and retirement? Or was each play precious to him because it expressed something of his musings upon life, love, and death? Certainly Shakespeare was not a didactic poet, like Spenser or Milton. He wrote to delight, either with happiness or wise sorrow, rather than to instruct. And equally certainly it was his intention as a man of affairs, if not as a poet, to win fame and honour, and to make for himself wealth and position. That is apparent not only from the records of his growing riches, but also from the way in which he followed dramatic fashion. Kit Marlowe took the town by storm, and Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* and *Richard II*. John Lyly charmed the court, and Shakespeare invented *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ben Jonson captivated the academic world, and Shakespeare tried his hand at the humours. Beaumont and Fletcher won the admiration of gentlemen and courtiers by their representation of the modes of court, and Shakespeare gave them *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. Yet even in following fashions, Shakespeare was not servile. He transformed whatever he borrowed, and his style is always his own.

But granted all this, can we not couple with his intention to hit and hold the popular taste a deeper intention to be deduced from his inspirations and their transformations at his hands? Why did he depict with such supreme force certain characters—Falstaff, Malvolio, Angelo, Hamlet, Prospero? Why did he select the particular fictions which he made his own? We know that he believed, to quote the words which he gave to Touchstone, that "the truest poetry is the most feigning." With a hundred



plots at his elbow, we must read intention into the plays which he chose to dramatize. And that intention was dramatic rather than æsthetic or ethical. Certain plays and certain "most feigning" stories evidently appealed to him more strongly than others. Their most dramatic situations found favour in his eyes as moments of truest poetry; and he set himself to make credible and probable the actors of these high passions. His aim is translated by Hamlet and applied to acting. "The purpose of playing was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, and show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure (impression). Now this overdone, or come tardy off—though it make the unskilful laugh—cannot but make the judicious grieve: the censure of the which one, must, in your allowance, o'erweigh a whole theatre of others." We cannot doubt that this was also Shakespeare's dramatic intention—"to hold the mirror up to nature"—to show the virtue of a Rosalind, to hold the image of Angelo up to scorn, to wring a tear for the tragic failure of Hamlet. And though he complied to some extent with popular taste in subject and style, his aim was to please not the "unskilful" but the critics—the "judicious," whose disapproval "must o'erweigh a whole theatre of others."

In Shakespeare's opinion, or at least in the opinion of his maturity, a play was a feigned and poetic representation of human life, whose object was to depict the lifelike images of virtue and vice, and more than that to indicate the significance of life and action—in his own words: "to show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." The dramatist has two chief ends in view: character, its portrait, emphasized by its rivals and its opposites; and action, its interest and its significance. The theory is obvious in the plays. Some of them



exhibit in the foreground a contrast of similar and yet different characters, Angelo and Isabella for instance in *Measure for Measure*, Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Cæsar*, Lear and Gloucester in *King Lear*. In the serious plays, the form and pressure of the age resolves itself into an inner significance or theme, of which the drama is as it were a dramatic picture. *The Merchant of Venice* is not merely the fairy tale of a bond sealed against the forfeit of a pound of flesh, it is an illustration of the eternal conflict between justice and mercy. *Cymbeline* is a foolish story of an incredible wager and its consequences; it is also a portrait of constancy exhibited in the faith and fortitude of Imogen. *Coriolanus* is more than the victories and vagaries of a Roman patrician; it is an apologue of the tactless pride that goes before a fall. Nevertheless Shakespeare's serious plays are not merely "problem plays"—*Hamlet* for instance is not a consideration of the ethics of revenge—they are significant not in any narrow sense, but rather in his selection of the special aspect of life which he chose as his subject, in his conception of illustrative character, and in his wisdom of enshrined common-sense. And the significance of his plays is only a part of his dramatic intention, which was to delight and to overwhelm with either imaginary happiness or grief.

The plays vary enormously in beauty and in technical excellence. That is only natural, as may be observed in the works of other novelists and dramatists. But in some of the plays there are peculiarities of idiom and technical imbecilities which seem quite unworthy of Shakespeare at his best. It is for these reasons, coupled as a rule with further internal evidence, that scholars are unanimous in describing as doubtful plays *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Pericles*, and *Henry VIII*. Some would add to these *Timon of Athens*.



Probably these plays are either revisions, or works written in collaboration with others. But though the twenty-eight or so unquestioned plays are unequal, none is without some interest, of story, character, theme, scene, and diction. Apart from any other interest, what stories are more romantic than the utter rapture of the tragic idyll of the love of Romeo and Juliet; or the pathos, jollity, and surprise of Viola's adventures in *Twelfth Night*; or the mingled charm of elopement, fairy magic, and the honest simplicity of rustic ignorance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Is there a better saga than that of Hamlet's revenge? Can we find words to praise highly enough the pathos of Desdemona's romance? In his choice of stories, and in making them English for all time, Shakespeare created English romantic fiction. His taste in selection educated and trained the taste of following generations. He taught poets the meaning of a romantic tale. He for the first time taught them, in Keats' words, to "load every rift with ore." Shakespeare endowed the English speaking peoples with a collection of dramatized tales that are the classics of romantic drama, and he is read by multitudes to-day, who care little for the theatre or for dramatic technique, simply for the glamour of his fictions and his amazing style. The English novel from Scott to Hardy owes more than is generally realized to the romantic taste of Shakespeare.

Every Shakespeare play consists of a progression of scenes, each of which contributes either to advance the plot, to illumine character, or to the total effect of the whole. They vary greatly in charm and in dramatic interest, but Shakespeare's major scenes are incomparable. It is difficult to praise enough the wonderful effect of some of his surprises, but the refusal of Master Barnardine to gratify the executioner in *Measure for Measure* (Act IV, Scene iii) is



a stroke of genius straight from a loving heart. It upsets the plot; but what is a plot in comparison with the salvation of such an oddity?—"insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal." The great tragedies offer a number of scenes that for dignity and power have never been equalled. They are too numerous to be mentioned. Every play contains two or more. But for sheer imaginative grasp, for lurid atmosphere, and tragic horror, the second act of *Macbeth* stands alone; and is there anything comparable, even in *King Lear*, to the sublimity—that is the only word—of the last scene in *Othello*? Shakespeare's finest scenes have an intensity, a fine excess of feeling, which stamps them as his alone. No other dramatist has consistently approached his genius in scene. In Dryden's words, "he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him."

If he rarely wrote an unnatural scene, we may say more, that he never created an unnatural character. Like his great scenes, his most striking characters have some quality in excess. They are not types, nor beings dominated by a ruling passion. They are complex, like living beings; though it may be that, for his dramatic purpose, one quality is emphasized. They are striking, not because they are unnatural, but because they are uncommon. The ordinary, mediocre sort of people are naturally undramatic. Put them in a farce and they lack wit; environ them with tragedy and they are mute or tearful. Shakespeare found little use for such except as a foil to finer natures. Polonius is one of them. Coleridge calls him "the personified memory of wisdom no longer actually possessed." And after mouthing his beautiful words of recollected common sense, Polonius is ground between the upper and lower millstones. Above all, Shakespeare admired an original and independent personality, however roguish. He loved Falstaff. He loved Bottom, and



Sir Toby. It seems as if he drew them, as he conceived also his tragic characters, not only from observation, but with a sympathetic imagination which transported his own feelings into the state and situation of a phantom in an imaginary world.

His tragedies are a world in themselves, illumined by the light which streams from the central figure. Not merely the story of a fate, each is the picture of life as it appeared to Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Coriolanus, and the rest. There is nothing mechanical about Shakespeare. He may have expended energy on plotting and structure, but we never hear the creaking of the machinery which animates the character. They are not puppets: they are flesh and blood, or something so like it that we take the illusion for reality; for they act like men, though they speak like poets. All are so independent of their creator that they appear to have a life which extends further than the play. We think of them not as figures created by Shakespeare to enact a dramatic story, but as rational beings, uttering their own sentiments and not Shakespeare's. This is a wrong view, but it is pardonable, because the illusion is so convincing. It is wrong, because, when all is said, every character is merely the creature of a dramatic situation and action; and each is characterized ultimately solely by what he says and does, and by what is said about him in the play. Their soliloquies are not always to be regarded as the speaker's inmost mind. Often they are designed to illustrate mental reaction of the character to a particular situation or scene. Sometimes the author's intention was to convey information necessary to the auditor's grasp of the development of the play. The mind which speaks is that which created the character—namely Shakespeare's.

His greatest characters are such complex and life-like images of nature that they serve equally either



as convincing dramatic figures, or as fit subjects for biography. Their appearance, their character, their motives, their temperament, have been the subject of a thousand essays. There is interest and even charm in this synthetic and imaginative portraiture of the critics. Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, De Quincey, have pictured them as English men and women; and have explained their effect on the critic and their function in the play. German critics have found in them types of a wider humanity, and have interpreted them with more philosophy than common sense. But when all is done, each reader and interpreter of Shakespeare must see them with his own vision, and accept the impression which his imagination builds. There is no need to endow them with a life apart from the play. They are not historical persons, they are fictions.

If Shakespeare's characters were portraits, the record of their originals is lost. And yet some of them look like portraits. Who, one wonders, was the witty and charming original of Rosalind—Beatrice? Who was the fat and roguish model for Sir Toby—Falstaff? Who was the dreamy and passionate Hamlet—Macbeth? But however they were conceived, by observation, by memory, or by imagination, they must have been to Shakespeare such real unrealities as were Dickens's characters to him. When he was writing the play they seemed to live and talk in the world of the play; but they had no life apart from the poet's imagination, they were "such stuff as dreams are made on"; and their little life was "rounded with a sleep." The wise critic will still regard them primarily as dramatic figures. Their personality is best expressed in the terms of their dramatic function. They are the pillars and buttresses of that dream palace which is the play. To pull the fairy castle to bits in order to examine the carving of the capitals is the destruction

of imaginative beauty in the name of criticism ; it is to prefer the stuffed animal or the microscopic section to the living thing of grace and beauty.

Shakespeare loved all living things. His was a healthy manly nature. There is nothing morbid in his works, no lingering on the description of foul disease, no introspection into the psychology of the abnormal, no justification of the eternal mutterings of the unable and the unworthy. He disliked with an active and virile hate evil and unkind men and women. He never in his plays permitted ill or unluck to triumph completely. Only once, in *Troilus and Cressida*, does a play end in a turmoil of despair. In his great tragedies, even in *Timon of Athens*, stalwart souls remain to rebuild the ruins of the fallen. His heroes, although they have destroyed the women whom they most love, atone for their hate, and seek a final reconciliation : Hamlet in Ophelia's grave, Othello in just self-murder, Lear in a dying kiss. Shakespeare was no sentimentalist in his dealings with crime and punishment. Hence it is that his large and comprehensive soul still influences young and old alike. He is our English Homer, the measure and model of poetic expression, the illustrator of honour and loyalty in man and woman.



## VIII

### SHAKESPEARE'S STYLE, LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION

SHAKESPEARE'S romantic spirit may possibly no longer charm a scientific age, his loose scenic structure may be unsuited to the conventions of modern stages, but his style is still a living force. He was the greatest writer of an age which shrank from plain simplicity and loved flexibility and vigour. Shakespeare's style is perhaps his most enduring claim to fame. A busy man, forced by press of circumstances to work rapidly, with little seclusion, one imagines, Shakespeare must have possessed amazing strength and power of concentration. He was sometimes careless in details, and some of his plays—*Antony and Cleopatra* and *Pericles* for instance—are amazingly, inexplicably, loose in structure; but in all, the interest is maintained to the end. He never put his hand to an absolutely futile plot. No play, not even *Troilus and Cressida*, ends in anti-climax. The poetic vein may run thin, but there is still some ore rich in the gold of orators and poets.

The diction of Shakespeare is a miracle of ease and variety. His extensive observation, his flexibility of thought, and his quick instinct for an apt symbol of comparison, were furnished with matter for immediate utterance by a mind stored with words of every kind, ranging from the pompous vocables of the learned through the ready and almost meaningless counters of everyday speech to the techni-

calities of the law, the stage, and the sea, and the rude and rustic dialect of the peasant. There was no *jus et norma loquendi* in the Elizabethan age. There was no standard prose style, with a distinctive syntax, and a definite use of words, based upon an ideal of lucidity and order combined with grace.

Elizabethan English was neither uniform nor exact. Even its accidence was uncertain. Shakespeare confused the use of "who," "which" and "whom"; and could employ on occasion the '-s' of the third person singular, present tense, of the verb in the plural. "Hath" was almost as good as "have," and "be" was just as correct as "are." It was not until well into the seventeenth century that English diction, accidence, syntax, and spelling became regularized; and they were not normalized until the eighteenth century. So that Shakespeare was possessed of greater freedom to exercise taste and caprice in choice of words, word-making, and composition, than succeeding poets and writers. He could make adjectives of substantives and speak of "virgin crants," or turn nouns into verbs, "prerogated" more richly than those who write in fear of the censure of the grammarian and the lexicographer. He could make coinages from the special meanings of words, like "unquestionable" (averse to conversation) from "question" in the meaning of conversation. He could make free use or misuse of prefixes, as in bestraught (distraught), contain (retain), imbar (bar out), subtractors (detractors); and like all Elizabethan writers he constantly employed words in a restricted or specialized meaning like cashiered (relieved of cash), derivative (inheritance), graceful (gracious), informal (incoherent), justify (prove), modern (trivial), phraseless (indescribable), practice (knavery). He coined words such as cloistress (nun), confiners (borderers), cowish (cowardly), injointed (united), irregulous (irregular), inaidible



(helpless), opposeless (irresistible), pew-fellow (companion), practisants (plotters), questants or questrists (seekers), seemers (hypocrites), treachers (traitors), unplausive (unapplauding), unrespective (inconsiderate), vastidity (vastness), or perhaps even confused words like impeachment (impediment), importance (importunity), memory (memorial), remember (remind), success (succession), temporary (temporal).

Sometimes his choice fell upon an antique word, such as estridges (ostriches), faitours (traitors), flote (wave), latch (catch), mislike (dislike), orts (scraps), owe (own), pight (pitched), reechy (smoky), rother (ox), shent (chided), or yare (quick). Sometimes his French borrowings, like œillades (glances), esperance (hope), sans (without), and his learned words, were hardly Englished. He uses epitheton (epithet), hysterica passio (hysterical passion), mome (fool), orgulous (proud), phantasma (nightmare), and proditor (traitor). The general effect of his diction upon modern taste is that of a splendour of contrast which is somewhat barbaric. Warwickshire dialect words like ballow (cudgell), biggen (cap), collied (dark), gallow (frighten), honeystalks (clover), mobled (wrapped), pash (smash), smack (taste harshly), shog (move off), shive (slice), lie cheek by jowl with sleek euphemisms, such as enseamed (fat), charactery (writing), having (property), mure (wall), reguerdon (reward), and the now archaic Elizabethan slang of whorson Ephesians and roaring boys. He appears to have been a lover of quaint words, and a great coiner of both words and phrases. He had been at many feasts of language, and had carried off not scraps, like Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel, but whole banquets. He wrote with easy fluency. He was never at loss for a word. If there was not one to hand, he coined one; and what he indited stood without correction: "He never blotted a line."



What strikes one most about his diction, over and above its teeming prodigality, is its contrast of interwoven simplicity and abstruseness.

His language is characterized by a fire of imagery of the boldest and most exaggerated order :

“ By heaven, methinks, it were an easy leap  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Whose fathom-line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.”  
(*1 Henry IV*, I, iii, 201-5.)

That is the sign-manual of Shakespeare at his most fluent and fanciful ; but even when he is more thoughtful and more intense, the same fire of imagination is apparent, though clouded by the smoke of passion :

“ His virtues  
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off ;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.”

(*Macbeth*, I, vii, 18-25.)

Shakespeare's is the poetry that charms by a fine excess. He sails a dangerous course between the rocks of thrice-piled hyperbole and bathos. Only he could do it, and it can never be done again, for though a modern poet were born with his genius, he could never approach the richness of his vocabulary, unless he wrote a jargon which bore no resemblance to any spoken or written language. Shakespeare's style is his own, melodious, vivid, and daringly expressive. His most glowing flights of fancy are unequalled and inimitable.

The richness of his diction and the splendour of



his imagery are his greatest charm. We have outgrown, perhaps, the boyishness of his romantic fiction; we shall never outgrow the charm of his poetry. Every page of his poems and plays contains some excellence of expression, some treasure of transliterated observation or fantasy, some finely uttered sensibility to beauty of appearance or image. What poet has surpassed his descriptions of natural beauty and sublimity? He loved all birds and flowers! the rustle of leaves, and the ripple of water. He was moved to poetry by green thicket and rolling woodlands, horrid crag and beetling cliff, yellow sands and the waves purling on a pebbly beach. Sunshine and storm, moonlight and mirk, every aspect of weather and atmosphere, had its own particular charm and poetic moment. Again, what English poet has so naturally and so engagingly expressed the proverbial wisdom and common sense of his race? What poet has ever endowed his imaginary men and women with such naturally poetic language, preserving their character in spite of the poetic diversity of his tongues, ranging from grave to gay, from rhetoric to the passion of the heart, from mere simplicity to deep wisdom and high intellect? Was there ever such natural propensity in one man's brain for all the hues of the mind? One can say of him as he said of Count Orsino in *Twelfth Night*: "his mind is a very opal." He flashes now fancy, now humour, then pathos, then wisdom. In his thoughts the elements of poetic greatness were so varied and so intermingled that he offers all, strength, sweetness, judgment, nonsense, description, imagination, in perfect contrast, and in harmonious balance.

He loved to adorn, to amplify, to illustrate, by means of comparison and analogy. "His complexion a perfect gallows," he says of a knave. The pompous and seeming wise have faces which "cream

and mantle, like a standing pond." His language was naturally tropical. "To snatch a kiss" becomes to steal "the impression of her fantasy." "Useless enquiry" becomes in Shakespeare's diction "bootless inquisition," a "feeble claim" is a "crazed title," the "pebbly shore" becomes "the beached margent of the sea." But why continue? Every lover of Shakespeare's style can cap each perfection of phrase with another. He offers perfect examples in English of the *mot juste*, and the pregnant phrase:

"Against the Capitol I met a lion  
Who glaz'd upon me, and went surly by."

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank."  
"Come, seeling night, Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day." "I'll use you for my mirth, yea, for my laughter, When you are waspish." "I flamed amazement." "My foot my tutor?" But there were moments when his amazing facility of expression carried him beyond the content of his thought, and he wrote lines which would perhaps have been more perfect after revision, passages of high sonority, but of doubtful meaning. It is hard to render, for example, the precise meaning of:

"He'll drop his heart into the sink of fear,  
And for achievement, offer us his ransom;"  
(*Henry V*, III, v, 57.)

or of:

"Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection."  
(*Julius Cæsar*, II, i, 63-9.)

The drift is plain, but the precise content of thought is not to be regained from the expression. Perhaps



the thought came from confines of the mind which lie beyond the finite reach of common language. That is certainly true of :

"She should have died hereafter ;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time ;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more ; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

(*Macbeth*, V, v, 18.)

Here the mirky mist is due to Shakespeare's interpretation of the distraught mind of Macbeth. To attempt lucidity in his lament for Lady Macbeth's death would have been to turn a Celtic chieftain into a rationalist. It will usually be found on re-reading such incomprehensibilities that there is both method and meaning in his obscurity.

Shakespeare's prose is picturesque and yet dignified. What charms one most is its flexibility and richness. His style is varied according to his mood and his matter, with a mastery that none has ever surpassed. All the styles indexed by the grammarian are his. Here is his imitation, based on a hint given by Plutarch, of the dry style of Brutus :

"If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Cæsar's, to him I say that Brutus's love to Cæsar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Cæsar, this is my answer : Not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Cæsar were living, and die all slaves, than that Cæsar were dead, to live all free men ? As Cæsar loved me, I weep for him ; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it ; as he was valiant, I honour him ; but as he was ambitious, I slew him." (*Julius Cæsar*, III, ii, 20.)

Here is the plain style, the voice of Falstaff in self-defence, almost shorn of extravagance :

" My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon with a white head, and something of a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with hollaing and singing of anthems. To approve my youth further, I will not : the truth is I am only old in judgment and understanding : and he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him." (*2 Henry IV*, I, ii, 206.)

And here the conversational style of the literary patron, Hamlet to the player :

" Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue ; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus : but use all gently. For in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness." (*Hamlet*, III, ii, 1.)

The neat style is parodied in the mincing airs of Malvolio :

" I will be proud. I will read politic authors. I will baffle Sir Toby. I will wash off gross acquaintance. I will be point-devise the very man. I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me ; for every reason excites to this,—that my lady loves me. She did commend my yellow stockings of late, she did praise my leg being cross-gartered ; and in this she manifests herself to my love, and with a kind of injunction drives me to these habits of her liking. I thank my stars I am happy." (*Twelfth Night*, II, v, 172.)

And the affected style of the pedant burlesqued in the poetic diction of Armado :

" Sweet sir !—Go, tenderness of years ; take this key, give enlargement to the swain, bring him festinately hither ; I must employ him in a letter to my love." (*Love's Labour's Lost*, III, i, 5.)



It is not difficult to recognize the same hand in each, and how magnificent is the modulation ! Here is the figurative style, Shakespeare's own natural idiom at its best, the language of Hamlet, Benedick, and Falstaff :

" I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises ; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory ; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man ! how noble is reason ! how infinite in faculty ! in form and moving how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world ! the paragon of animals ! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust ? " (*Hamlet*, II, ii, 305.)

This same astonishing flexibility and versatility is equally characteristic of his verse. He identifies himself with the situation. His blank verse style is perfectly adapted to his immediate intention or mood. Mark his observation in Titania's description of a wet summer :

" the green corn  
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard :  
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,  
The crows are fatted with the murrain flock,  
The nine-men's-morris is fill'd up with mud,  
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
For lack of tread are undistinguishable."  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, i, 95.)

With what a riot of dream imagery drawn from folklore does he make Mercutio describe the progress of Queen Mab ! And it is done with such realism that, unlike a dream, its picture remains :

"O! then I see Queen Mab hath been with you!  
 She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
 In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
 On the forefinger of an alderman,  
 Drawn with a team of little atomies  
 Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep:  
 Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs;  
 The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers;  
 The traces, of the smallest spider's web;  
 The collars, of the moonshine's watery beams;  
 Her whip, of cricket's bone; the lash, of film;  
 Her waggoner, a small grey coated gnat,  
 Not half so big as a round little worm  
 Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;  
 Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,  
 Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,  
 Time out of mind the fairies' coachmakers.  
 And in this state she gallops night by night  
 Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love."  
 (*Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 53-71.)

Here is the imagination of Shakespeare when identified with the suffering of King Lear:

"And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!  
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
 Never, never, never, never, never!—  
 Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir,—  
 Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,  
 Look there, look there!"  
 (*King Lear*, V, iii, 304.)

But he could adapt his command of language equally to the pomp of rhetoric:

"O! for a Muse of fire, that would ascend  
 The brightest heaven of invention;  
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act  
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.  
 Then should the war-like Harry, like himself,  
 Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,  
 Leash'd in like hounds, should Famine, Sword, and Fire  
 Crouch for employment."  
 (*Henry V*, I, Chorus.)



Or to reflection, in the melancholy passion of Hamlet :

“ who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,—  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of ?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.”  
(*Hamlet*, III, i, 78.)

If it be true that he writes impersonally and rarely obtrudes his likes and dislikes in his poetry, one cannot truly say that his style is lacking in individuality. It points to a mind with a vast acquaintance, if not with an intimate knowledge, of all sorts and conditions of men, their works, their thoughts, and their common humanity ; a mind quick both in observation and fancy, which thought largely in terms of pictorial images, and loved to translate the literal into the symbolic and metaphorical. If figurative language was his natural mode of expression, he was also observant and reflective, “ full of wise saws, and modern instances.” Our proverbial wisdom has been enriched by scores of his wise reflections. But his mind turned just as readily to puns, allusions, and nonsense wit, such as he gave to the Clown in *Twelfth Night* : “ as the old hermit of Prague said to a niece of King Gorboduc, ‘ that that is, is.’ ” Shakespeare’s idiom was varied not only with the necessary mood of the fiction, but by his interest in his work. When his interest flagged, he did not become dull ; he became obscure. His lines are tortuous, not with the distracted thought of his tragic heroes, not with the ellipsis characteristic of the verse of the later plays, but through lack of inspiration. The intensity of his style demanded a



like intensity of interest. When this was present, the clotted syntax, which is characteristic of parts of all his work, disappeared; and his style became a burning lucidity of directness and metaphor. The language of Shakespeare is of inexhaustible interest. His idiom is the proudest and most splendid of all English writers. We forgive him his occasional tortuosities, nay, we forget them, for the richness of his imagery and diction, and the sweetness of his music.

His contemporaries noticed and admired the honeyed sweetness of his verse, and despite the changes which have overtaken the pronunciation of English since his days, it is apparent still. The charm of his verse is not simply to be explained by the beauty of appropriate or bold imagery, or even by his rhythmical and melodious diction. It is not merely that he is master of the connotation of words. It is not only that he is a past master of the art of coining striking and apt phrases. It is not even that he is grand master of the value of subtle contrast of sounds—as in “mobled queen,” “it was the owl that shriek’d,” or the famous cry of Macbeth:

“Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.”

In an infinity of such nervous and sonorous passages, he plays upon the variation and contrast of vowel sounds as on a pipe, suiting the natural pitch and length of the vowel to the subtle melody which is the plain-song of his poetry. These gifts are the property in a greater or lesser degree of all great poets, and no one is rightly called a poet unless he has learned the mystery of the associations of words, and the power of vocalic melody. The flavour of Shakespeare’s verse is something even more subtle.



Perhaps it is insoluble and inexplicable to reason. But we may truly say that there is a Shakespearian style which is personal and unmistakable, and its lost secret was Shakespeare's own personal association of word-meaning, melody, and rhythm. It depended partly on the conscious meaning of words, and partly on the unconscious emotional sympathy between poetic feeling on the one hand and contrasted sound and varied rhythm on the other.

The ideal rhythmical pattern of blank verse is a line of ten syllables, swayed by five alternations of weak and strong accents; or, if we prefer so to regard it, a verse containing five rising dissyllabic feet, each consisting of an unaccented followed by an accented syllable.

· — · — · — · — · —

They sparkle still the right Promethean fire.

At the end of each line should be a pause of lesser or greater duration, indicated to the reader often by some mark of punctuation.

But comparatively few actual verses written by Shakespeare conform to the metrical ideal. Even in his earliest verse Shakespeare saw the monotony of regularity, and provided for variations of the normal. Often he made a half pause or cæsure within the line. This is not invariable, and there is no regular place for it when it does occur. When there is an internal pause, it is most frequent after the fourth or sixth syllable; but examples of this slight check to the swing of the rhythm are found also after the second syllable, the third, fifth, and seventh. He constantly omitted, and varied the position of, the internal pause; and the intensity of his accented syllables was never uniform and constant. Here are some examples of variations of the line brought about by internal pause:

## 148 A PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

After the 2nd syllable.—But, look! the moon in russet  
mantle clad.

„ „ 3rd „ I fly thee, for I would not injure  
thee.

„ „ 4th „ The morning wears, 'tis time we  
were at church.

„ „ 5th „ But let concealment, like a  
worm i' th' bud.

„ „ 6th „ A twelve month shall you spend,  
and never rest.

„ „ 7th „ On what compulsion must I?  
tell me that.

He obtained great variety by variation of the pause alone. But from the very beginning of his versification he also sought variety in other devices, such as the use of rimed verse; in short or defective lines, the use of which perhaps he had learned from Robert Greene, as in:

Shall I bend low, and in a bondsman's key,  
With bated breath, and whispering humbleness,  
*Say thus:*

“Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last.”

Another favourite mode of obtaining variety was the substitution of a falling dissyllabic foot (— ·) for a rising (· —), or, if we prefer so to regard it, by inversion of the accent within a foot. This may happen in any of the five feet of the line:

1st foot.—Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.

2nd „ The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail.

3rd „ My lands and all things that thou dost call  
thine.

4th „ T' excuse their after-wrath, husband, I come.

5th „ Methinks I should know you, and know this  
man.

but is commonest in the first foot.



Similar to this was the slurring together of two light syllables in the unaccented part of the foot. Some regard this as the insertion of an extra-metrical syllable. Others would explain it as the metrical substitution of a trisyllabic rising foot or anapæst (· · —) for a dissyllabic or iambic foot (· —). This variation may occur in any foot except the last :

1st foot.—Marry, thou dost wrong me ; thou, dis-  
   sembler, thou.  
 2nd    ,,     With all the abhorred births below crisp  
   heav'n.  
 3rd    ,, } Whereon Hyperion's quickening fire doth  
 4th    ,, } shine.

But Shakespeare's desire to reproduce something of the freedom of conversation led him more and more away from the metrical pattern of blank verse, even with these freedoms conceded. He felt the pause at the end of the line to be a shackle. Conversation does not run in pulses of five beats, and he knew it. He let the line run on without a break, to find a natural pause within a succeeding line, wherever it might occur. This was a device which was especially apt for the indication of deep emotion, such as that of Lear :

"Methinks I should know you, and know this man ;  
 Yet I am doubtful : for I am mainly ignorant  
 What place this is, and all the skill I have  
 Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not  
 Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,  
 For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
 To be my child Cordelia."

or Othello :

"Like to the Pontic sea,  
 Whose icy current and compulsive course  
 Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on  
 To the Propontic and the Hellespont,  
 Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,  
 Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to human love,

Till that a capable and wide revenge  
Swallow them up."

Hence this overwhelming of the pause by the sentence—it can scarcely be called a metrical device—is much more common in the tragedies.

A similar aid to the ease of conversational style was the introduction of a weak syllable either at the end of a line, or after the internal pause. The former is much more common than the latter, and the increasing frequency of its use is one of the characteristics of Shakespeare's later style. The early plays contain very few lines of eleven metrical syllables. The later and latest plays contain many lines patterned to:

• — • — • — • — • — •

as,

For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune ;  
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,  
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

And we might note that occasionally even an additional foot is added, making the line a so-called "Alexandrine" with six accented syllables.

On the other hand, the addition of an extra metrical syllable after the internal pause is rare :

2nd foot.—But how of Cawdor ? The Thane of Cawdor  
lives.

3rd „ No further than the Tower ; and as I guess

And the converse of this, the omission of a metrical unstressed syllable after an internal pause, is also uncommon :

The handle toward my hand ?—Come, let me clutch  
thee !—

and was only naturally used after a rhetorical pause.

We have said that the intensity of the accented syllables varies. This is perfectly natural to recitation. Nothing could be more mechanical than the



corn-crake repetition of regularly repeated equal accents. The effect to be avoided at all costs is that each blank line shall sound something like :

A way, a wee, a why, a whoa, a woo.

In the recitation of dramatic blank verse there is a rhetorical rhythm superimposed on the poetic rhythm of five accents. Much of the beauty of Shakespeare's verse, as of Milton's, resides in the subtle interplay of the natural stress of spoken English and the iambic pattern of verse. The rhetorical rhythm, produced by the attempt to declaim blank verses naturally rather than artificially, bears some affinity to the metrical system of Old English poetry, and its complexity defies such analysis as can be made of deviations from iambic pattern ; but it will be found, if one reads blank verse to emphasize sense rather than metrical feet, that the number of strong stresses is rarely five, usually four, and often three. The five accents of metrical rhythm are not all of the same strength, nor should they be emphasized unnaturally. That the verse was intended to be recited rhetorically is indicated by the peculiar system of punctuation of the old texts, which, as Mr. Percy Simpson has shown in *Shakespearean Punctuation* (1911), was never intended to be grammatical, but was rather a guide to the rhetorical declamation of the verse.

Shakespeare did not always write blank verse when he wished to forsake prose. In some of the early plays there is much rimed verse in couplets and stanzas which can only be the fruit of design. *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contain more rimed verse than any of the plays, and rime is also found in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II.* But in the later plays he forsook rime, except for some pointed reason. The final couplet which marks the end of a scene was almost inevitable in the absence of a curtain.



Sententious maxims, and protestations of love are occasionally rimed. And his fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the witches in *Macbeth* are often made to speak in verse. But as far as one can see, though the intention of Shakespeare's use of rime in particular instances can be explained, there is no general rule which can explain why he used rimed verse at times. Certainly as his command of the rhythms and variations of blank verse grew, he tended more and more to discard rime, except in the final couplet.

When all is said on the very unsatisfactory subject of prosody—a science which needs no explanation to its practitioners, the poets, but which they cannot either precisely or completely explain to others—it is not his innumerable varieties of rhythm and vowel contrast which make Shakespeare our greatest poet. Milton excelled him as a master both of the line and the paragraph in blank verse, though he lacked the variety and the rich, if somewhat more barbaric, vocabulary of Shakespeare. Shakespeare also possessed the gifts of beauty and sublimity of conception and expression, but his endowment was broader and richer than that of Milton, or indeed any other English poet, save possibly Browning. He was a poet, but he was a humorist too, a master of pathos, and no mean satirist, with a genius for understanding and interpreting human nature. He understood the feelings and the thoughts of men. Every aspect of nature, every department of human activity was to him a potential symbol of poetic truth. He was a great stylist because he was a great man—a man of feeling, a man of intellect, a man of rightly ordered instincts. He never allowed any enthusiasm to run to seed. His style indicates perfect balance of mental qualities and physical interests. He was a literary genius, and at the same time a sane and versatile citizen of the world.



## IX

### THE GENIUS OF SHAKESPEARE

AND so for four centuries Shakespeare has been to lay and learned alike the greatest name in English literature. Youth has found in his plays, together with eloquence of language and the very witchery of romantic story, jollity of frolic and fun ranging from frank nonsense to a grim jest in the presence of death, and a pathos which may wring the heartstrings with its poignancy even to tears, or, at its noblest, fortify the soul with the purifying strength of tragedy. Age has still found the same interest and delight, and a wisdom born of depth and seriousness which it was wont to pass by when yet intent merely on colour and passion. Shakespeare had more splendid certitude in choice of action, greater powers of observation and imaginative introspection, and a soul greater in magnanimity and more splendid in passion than any other English poet. And it does not appear as if time with its patient endeavours would alter the general verdict.

He is our greatest dramatist, great in story, great in his multitude of imaginary characters, great in language, and above all great in understanding of human nature and in that ripe wisdom of reflection which is the salt of literature. Indeed it would be no exaggeration to say that Shakespeare created English drama. He first brought it to perfection of purpose. Under the colour of romantic action he made drama hold the mirror up to nature, and

present to the audience natural and convincing men and women. He taught men to laugh at things worthy of laughter. He rejoiced with lovers, and poured scorn on affectation. He celebrated noble women, and found merit in true love. Rustics, village constables, and faithful servants of all kind found favour in his eyes. But self-love and self-righteousness, the presumption of gentility without true gentleness, boasting, and affectation, were butts for his pointed wit, and received short consideration and scant mercy.

He first and almost alone amongst the English dramatists wrought in dramatic story the true pathos of tragedy, free from sentimentality and poetic justice, and taught men to weep in fortitude for noble failure. Human weakness and error were to Shakespeare no object of satire, but rather occasions for pity and resolution. And the many-charactered marks which he put upon English drama, romantic story, convincing characterization, eloquent declamation, witty badinage, satire which is kindly rather than comic, the joy of success in love, the inexplicable pathos of suffering and failure, these characteristics, and a host more, have been an inspiration and a model to dramatists from his day to ours.

Shakespeare not only brought English drama to its earliest perfection, and gave it as it were a habitation and a name, but he created a taste and established a tradition. When he began to revise and write plays, drama was scarcely adrift from the virtues and vices of the old morality plays and interludes. Shakespeare made drama significant rather than allegorical. To many, the only corrective for the clumsy structure, and bucolic bluster and sentimentality of the traditional English drama appeared to be the architectural form, and the simplicity and decorum of classical drama. The scholar and gentleman, who knew his Terence and his Seneca,



admired rhetorical eloquence, and was pleased by the alternation of declamation and brisk dialogue. No doubt to such a critic the adaptation of the old and well-proved classical formula to new actions selected from fact and romantic fiction was a delight, even if it cramped the action by forcing it into a Procrustean framework of five acts; and inasmuch as his taste admired grace and proportion, and abhorred brawling, bombast, and open manslaughter, we may sympathize and agree with him.

Shakespeare improved native drama without adopting the outworn formula of an older world. He dramatized his actions in as many or as few scenes as his conception required. He made no complete distinction between comedy and tragedy. If he thought a play too intense or too overwhelming, he introduced a comic porter or a pair of rustic grave-diggers. If on the other hand it appeared to be deficient in dramatic interest, he brought the hero in within an ace of ruin and dishonour, or the hero beneath the shadow of death. He wrote in verse, blank verse, or prose as the occasion warranted. If the action compassed the death of a person, he held himself free either to represent it in scene, or to describe it in the declamation of a messenger, as he thought most fitting. In comedy and tragedy alike he surpassed, using their native means and methods, all the dramatists of his age. And the native tradition, as vindicated and established by Shakespeare, triumphed over the classical tradition, survived the excellence of Racine and Alfieri, and is alive to-day. No modern dramatist, one need hardly say, would construct a play as did Shakespeare. The modern scenic stage demands fewer and longer scenes. But Shakespeare's conception of what drama is, his method of making character live, his masterly welding of realism with romance, his merry comedy, his pitiful tragedy, his jest, his earnest, his gibe, his



taunt, are still a living influence upon drama, and a measure of dramatic values. Shakespeare made drama emphatic rather than elegant.

Had there been no Shakespeare, it is hard to think what English drama might have been. It might very possibly have fluctuated between crude sensational melodrama and a rather mechanical comedy, satirical of those who are more to be pitied than blamed. And most probably it would have expired in the seventeenth century leaving no outstanding name as a standard of achievement and a model of style. Shakespeare is our classical dramatist. His greatest plays are at once living types of drama and standards of dramatic excellence. It is hard to find an English drama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which does not at some point or in some characteristic disclose the influence of Shakespeare. He found English drama brick. He left it marble.

At the beginning of his career a host of literary problems still vexed the brains of dramatists and critics. Should English drama, for instance, attempt to break entirely with the mediæval tradition of loose scenic structure? Scenic structure had been the natural mode for interlude and pageant, and was being employed by the writers of popular historical or comic plays. But academic critics demanded the five acts which Horace in his *Ars Poetica* had enjoined, together with that rigid limitation of scene to one locality, and of time to a concurrent period of not more than twenty-four hours, which the Italian critics of the Renaissance had prescribed, and their dramatists had obeyed. And so also English academic playwrights were gratifying the universities and the Inns of Court with colourable imitations of classical tragedy and comedy. Again, what should be the appropriate poetic style of drama? Prose, or verse? And if verse, was it to be rimed or blank verse? There was no definite answer, but the



practice of the academic dramatists was to allow prose in comedy, and to insist upon verse for tragedy. Further they asked: what was a proper subject for tragedy? There were many answers to this. Few insisted upon rigid limitation to the actual mythology of Senecan tragedy. Most dramatists preferred to find in history, or in what passed for history, some fatal story which combined pathos and epic dignity; but a few, who regarded the sanctity of the home as of infinitely greater moment than the ruin of kingdoms, dramatized from life narratives of domestic unhappiness and disaster, such as that of *Arden of Feversham*. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd created the English ancestor of a type of tragedy which thrilled and harrowed the onlookers by the native strength of its situations. Marlowe, in *Faustus* and in *Tamburlaine*, interwove into the action and reaction of the tragic conflict the characterization of a central figure, the tragic hero. But his emphasis upon tragic character led to another problem. Was the character of the tragic hero to be simple and consistent to one ruling passion or to one type of character, or was it to be complex and unfathomable, like living character in real life? Should tragedy be simply a dramatic example of "if you be too hard, you will be broken; if too feeble, you will be crushed"? Or was it possible that with greater fidelity to the mystery of human motives and actions, it might become something inscrutable and sublime, blending pathos and even horror with something of the incomprehensibility of the losing game of life?

Shakespeare finally settled all these problems. Definitely rejecting the form of classical comedy and tragedy, he combined scenic structure with the larger symmetry of five acts, and if he thought a prologue and a narrative chorus an advantageous addition to a rambling story, he made use of them. He made drama convey a story. To him dramatic plot was

not merely the argument of a single and simple action ; it was a suitable, interesting, complex, and significant story, romantic in atmosphere and human in its essential motives. He rejected rimed verse except for songs, after a short period of trial and experiment, in favour of blank verse and prose. He made comedy a blend of wonder and wit, a romantic love-story in verse interleaved with realistic and witty farce in prose. He abolished the horseplay and trickery of Elizabethan traditional comedy, and in conceding a clown to his audience made his fools and foolish fellows either the objects of volleys of satirical laughter, or the creators of witty wisdom masquerading in jesters' motley. He separated tragedy from the historical drama in which it had flourished naturally, and made it all his own, romantic, intense, sublime, and yet vital and humane.

Shakespeare's achievement is the highest pitch of poetic drama in England. His influence upon later romantic story, dramatic scene, characterization, and poetic style has been and still is enormous. English drama and English poetry have constantly looked to him for inspiration. His plays are the standard of excellence in romantic drama, and only the few greatest writers of English verse and prose have written a style which is comparable to his.



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